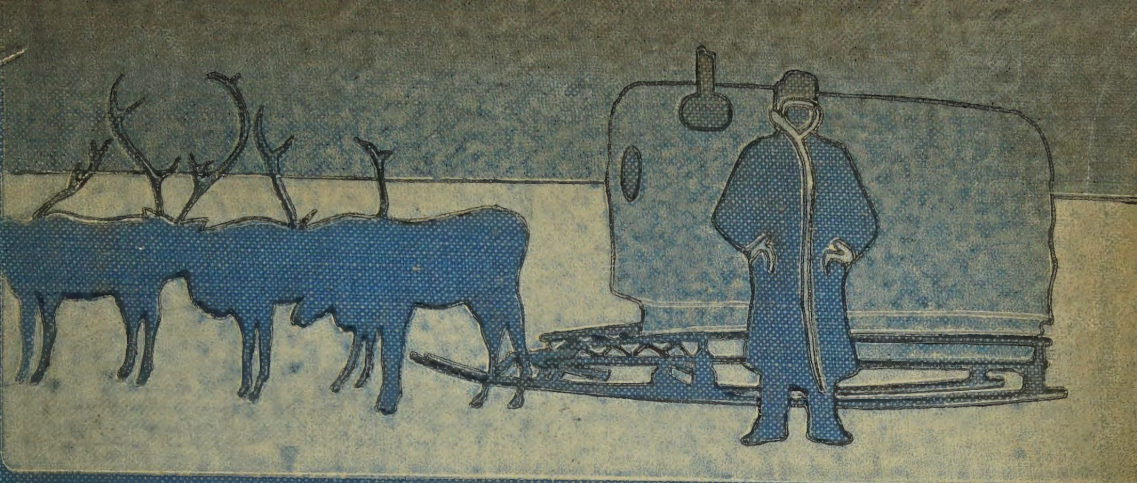

THROUGH SIBERIA

J. STADLING

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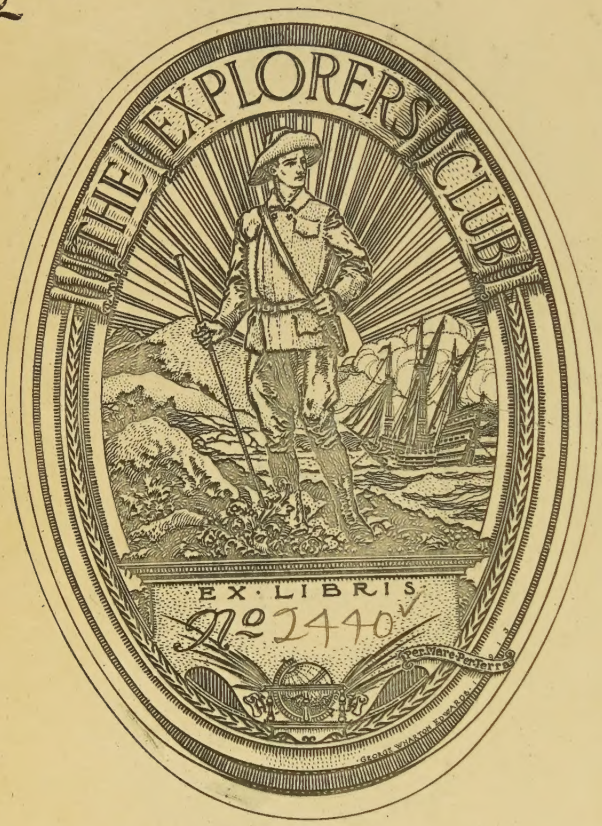

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NILSON BIDS US ADIEU.

THROUGH SIBERIA

Songs Jonsson

BY

J. STADLING.

EDITED BY F. H. H. GUILLEMARD,

M.A., M.D. (Cantab.)

WITH 47 ILLUSTRATIONS

And 2 MAPS.

WESTMINSTER

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PREFACE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that the world is now passing through a phase of eager geographical exploration and discovery to which no period—not even the Elizabethan—affords a parallel, there are still countries whither the traveller, be he naturalist, geographer, or sportsman, but rarely directs his steps. Siberia is one of them. The map of Africa is becoming almost as crowded with place-names as that of France, and we are steadily filling in the Arctic and even the Antarctic coast-lines, but the Land of the Tundra remains almost as unknown to Englishmen as it was in the days of Cochrane, when, eighty years ago, he set himself the astounding task of walking, baggageless and alone, from Dieppe to Kamschatka. The Treaty of Nertchinsk is a couple of centuries old, and the Russian conquerors had reached the furthest limits of the vast land even earlier, but no one now thinks of following in their footsteps.

Travellers, it is true, there are, and in fair number, who homeward or outward bound between China and Europe have passed over the Great Siberian Road, or its latter-day substitute, the Trans-Siberian Railway, but they have for the most part been mere birds of passage, seeing but

little of the land or the native races. The exile and the "Gold-Baron" are neither sons of the soil, nor even the most interesting features of it. It is from those who leave the highways for the byways that we learn most, and as Mr. Stadling's journeys led him not only into little-known districts, but over the far northern tundras of the Taimyr which have never before been traversed by civilised man, he stands in no need of editorial apologies. A word or two, however, is perhaps permissible upon the author himself and the motives of his journey.

Well known in his own country, Sweden, as a traveller and sociologist, Mr. Stadling in the course of his wanderings has made himself acquainted with many lands, but it is Russia which appears always to have had the greatest fascination for him. As the representative of various philanthropists in America and Sweden he coöperated with the Tolstoy family in fighting the famine of 1892, and has visited the country on several other occasions, making himself acquainted with the language and the people, and thus equipping himself in the best possible manner for the journey of which this volume is the record.

When Andrée first contemplated his hazardous attempt to reach the Pole by balloon, Mr. Stadling accompanied him to the north, and again in the following year, when he witnessed his departure. As the months passed away, and no tidings of the explorer came to relieve the anxiety of his friends, it was resolved that search should be made along the Siberian coast-line, and with this object in view the author undertook, at the request of the Swedish Geographical Society, to proceed thither, and see if any news of the expedition could be obtained from the nomadic

tribes of the tundras. It was decided to descend the Lena River to its mouth, and thence to go westward by sledge to the Lower Yenisei, and this plan was eventually carried out, though not without considerable risk, for the explorers having been frozen-in on a small island in the Lena delta, came within measurable distance of sharing the fate of the crew of the *Jeannette*, who, it may be remembered, perished of cold and starvation within a few miles of this very spot in 1881. But though the author and his companions escaped such mischance, and were successful in establishing relations with the natives over a wide area, the mystery of Andrée's fate, as all the world knows, still remains to be solved.

The reader will perhaps regret that Mr. Stadling has dwelt so sparingly upon his own personal adventures in the following narrative, and, if he be a naturalist, that there are so few references to the plants and animals of this little-known region. But with regard to the latter it must be remembered that the journey was made in winter, when even a Middendorff could have done little, while, if the day-to-day incidents are kept in the background, we are given in place of them much that is of interest on the more serious questions affecting the country. Here, too, the author's information is of especial value, backed as it is by his knowledge of the Russian people and their language. No one will deny that we should be able to recognise a disorder before we can hope to find a remedy, and it is therefore satisfactory to learn that the views of Mr. Stadling are in accord with those of most English travellers as to the moral and social malady which has so long affected Siberia. What Mr. Seebohm describes on the Petchora

and the Yenisei, and Mr. Stadling on the Lena, holds good, as I can myself testify, for Kamschatka. The hopeless official corruption everywhere prevalent is the "worm i' the bud" of progress, and what mischief is left undone by this is completed by the trader and vodka. Before them combined the native is fast approaching his inevitable fate.

F. H. H. Guillemard.

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THROUGH SIBERIA.

CHAPTER I.

TO THE GATE OF SIBERIA.

The Object of our Journey—Polar Expeditions of 1898—The Vega-Stipendium and our Party—In St. Petersburg—The Crowding at the Gate—Emigration Statistics—Talks with the Mujiks.

At the beginning of the year 1898 I expressed to the chairman of the Swedish Anthropological and Geographical Society, Baron Nordenskjöld, my opinion that something ought to be done by my countrymen towards the search for Andrée in northern Siberia, pointing out the following reasons for the despatch of an expedition. During the summer of 1898 the polar basin would be surrounded by a chain of various expeditions with the most northern limits of the accessible parts of the Arctic Ocean and islands as their goal. Large and well-equipped scientific expeditions were bound for the north-west and the north-east of Greenland (a Danish expedition to the former and Sverdrup and Peary to the latter), for Spitsbergen (one Russian and two Swedish expeditions), and for Franz Joseph's Land (Wellman's and Prof. Nathorst's expeditions); a large number of whalers were about to cruise in the seas between Jan Mayen and Novaya

Zemlia; an English fleet of merchantmen were reported to be going to the mouth of the Yenisei, and a Russian expedition to western Taimyr. In addition to these, whalers and trading expeditions were about to proceed to the regions between the Atlantic and Hudson Bay, and north-east of Bering Strait as far as to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. In this chain of expeditions surrounding the polar basin there were, however, large breaks, and among them a great gap on the coasts of northern Siberia, east and west of the mouth of the Lena and the New Siberian Islands. I therefore considered it of importance to ascertain whether trappers and collectors of mammoth-tusks had visited those islands during the year 1897; for, if not, an expedition ought, I thought, to go there and find out whether the supplies left upon them by Baron von Toll for Andrée had been touched or not, in other words, whether any traces of Andrée could be discovered. Not less important would it be to communicate with the natives roaming far and wide on the endless tundras near the Arctic coast, in order to ascertain whether they had observed any traces of the missing explorer, and, by promises of liberal rewards, to incite them to be on the look-out for such traces in the future on the coasts of the Arctic Ocean. This opinion of mine met with cordial assent not only on the part of Baron Nordenskjöld, but also from other prominent members of our Geographical Society.

When I broached the plan, it was not my intention eventually to embark on such a journey myself, as I con-

sidered that it would be better with a younger man than myself as leader. However, as it proved impossible to find some more suitable person acquainted with the Russian language, and as I was not unwilling to accept such a mission, I finally gave in to my friends' suggestion and consented to undertake the expedition, and for this purpose the "*Vega-stipendium*" of our Geographical Society was granted to me. I felt it to be a national duty to do all in my power to search for my friends, Andrée and his companions, whose never-to-be-forgotten departure from Spitsbergen I had witnessed.

For the purpose of making botanical researches on the lower Lena, Mr. N. H. Nilson, M.A., of Lund was selected to accompany me, and at the last moment Mr. H. Frænkel, a younger brother of Knut Frænkel who went with Andrée, joined my little expedition. Necessary funds for making collections having been provided by private persons and the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, we left the Swedish capital on the 20th of April, 1898, for St. Petersburg, where we had to stop a week in order to procure the necessary passports and introductions and complete our equipment. The authorities showed us much kindness, and granted us free passes on the Russian railroads.

On the 1st of May we left St. Petersburg. Arriving too late at Moscow for the express-train for Siberia, we had to take an ordinary train, which was very crowded. After a tedious journey of four days and nights, during which we had carefully to guard our baggage against thieves,

we finally arrived at Tschelàbinsk, the "Western Gate of Siberia," and the terminus of the great Trans-Siberian railroad.

This first station on the Siberian railway is beautifully situated among birch-groves in a valley on the eastern slopes of the Ural mountains, near the border between Asia and Europe. Formerly a small posting-station, Tschelàbinsk, since the opening of the western part of the Siberian railroad, has grown rapidly in importance. Like most centres of population in Siberia, the town is situated a few kilometres from the railroad. The railway-station is altogether too small to answer the growing requirements of traffic, and we found it the scene of incredible crowding and confusion. For a great distance along the line there were piles upon piles of various kinds of goods lying in the open, or sheltered only by primitive sheds or by tarpaulin. It was said by persons competent to judge that there were about 4000 waggon-loads of goods—cereals, hides, tallow, furs, etc., awaiting transport. This hopeless blocking of goods here and at other places on the Siberian railway is a problem not easily solved. The construction of the line throughout is as yet only of a temporary character, and it therefore cannot stand a forced traffic before thorough reconstruction and the laying of new rails has taken place. Yet specialists consider that even now the traffic might be increased considerably on the Siberian line. The greatest hindrances, however, are not in Siberia itself, but west of the Siberian border, on the Slatoust-Samara line which passes

through the Ural mountains and the province of Ufa, the construction of which does not permit such an increased traffic as would satisfy the requirements of the export of goods from Siberia.

From Europe to Siberia the goods traffic is not so great, but that of ordinary passengers and emigrants is enormous. A great number of adventurers and fortune-seekers from all parts of Russia and from foreign countries are coming with the new railroad to the new country, but their number, large though it be, is insignificant in comparison with the immense flood of emigrants which the chronic famine in Russia is sending to Siberia. And these emigrants—the only persons who go to Siberia to stay there and cultivate the immense country—must, every one of them, stop at Tschelàbinsk to show their passports and other documents proving that they have received legal permission to emigrate. The other travellers to Siberia, who go there only to exploit the country and return again with their booty, are allowed to pass on without any requirements of this kind. Large barracks in the form of blockhouses, and also a temporary hospital and "people's kitchen," have been erected in the neighbourhood of the station, to provide for the emigrants at this their *point de départ* for the promised land.

Emigration to Siberia has increased immensely since the opening of the western section of the railway. As is well known, Siberia was peopled mainly by enforced colonisation until the close of 1850, when voluntary emigrants

commenced in small numbers to cross the Asiatic border. During the period between 1870 and 1886, according to official reports, 286,504 emigrants went to Siberia. The great famine in Russia in the beginning of the nineties increased the emigration enormously. Thus in 1892 about 200,000 peasants left their homes for Siberia. The annual number of emigrants during subsequent years has varied between 100,000 and 200,000. In 1897 205,000 passed Tschelàbinsk only; during 1898 and 1899 these numbers have been still further increased. Naturally, such a great outflow of working men from Russia frightened the large landowners, who urged the government to stop the exodus. Measures for this purpose having failed, the authorities have for the future limited themselves to endeavouring to restrain and control this great eastern migration of the *mujik*. Thus no peasant is permitted to pass Tschelàbinsk without proving his permission to emigrate, but, as a matter of fact, the law is evaded by many who cross the border in other places.

At the time of our passing through Tschelàbinsk there were over 3000 emigrants waiting for their turn to move eastward to the promised land. The long platform and the grounds about the station were teeming with living bundles of rags—men, women and children, emaciated by hunger, matted with dirt, and one and all with that apathetic and hopeless expression which I so well knew from my stay in the famine-stricken provinces of Russia in 1892. While waiting for the departure of the train, I went up

RUSSIAN EMIGRANTS ON THE ROAD TO SIBERIA.

and talked to a group of these unhappy people. I asked them where they had come from, and whither they intended to go. Before I had received any intelligible answer, I was surrounded by men, women, and children, who all began to talk at the same time, so that I could only catch a few broken words: "Your high nobility" ... "merciful *barin*" ... "benefactor" ... "for Christ's sake". The women cried, the children stared at me. I quieted them, and asked what they were all doing at this place.

"What are we doing?" repeated a piping voice with mocking accent from the crowd. "We are burying our dead, that's what we are doing. Only to-day two babies have died at the station."

Two *mujiks* now came forward cap in hand and began to talk both at the same time. "Shut up, Stepan; Vanushka came first!" interrupted the same piping voice from the crowd.

Vanushka began again: "Your high nobility, I and my wife and children have come from Nikolaievsk, that is to say, my wife was born in Busuluk, her father was servant there, and we did not get more for our *izba* (farmer's hut) and the cow than what was needed for the ticket to Petropavlovsk; and our debt to Andreitch we have to pay afterwards" ...

"The passport, the passport! *Ach, Gospodee!* (oh, Lord!) *That* was what you had to tell the *barin* about," again interrupted the voice, which seemed to belong to some leading man among the emigrants.

"The passport, oh, Lord!" repeated Vanushka. "The village-community had nothing against me, I had paid my taxes, and finally I got my passport. I carried it on me, and then I put it in my trunk, but now it is lost... Oh, Lord! Help me, merciful *barin!* For if not, I shall have to return, and we have nothing, all are starving at home"... He was interrupted by the wailing of the woman.

Then Stepan began his story in the same roundabout way. He, too, had lost his trunk, and so had several others, and they begged me to help them to get them back. They had been detained two weeks because of those lost trunks! Other emigrants begged money for their starving or sick relatives. It was a pitiful story; alas! only too common, I fear, in the history of this colossal expatriation.

CHAPTER II.

THE STEPPES OF WESTERN SIBERIA.

The Siberian Train—The West Siberian Lowlands—A Dreary Plain—Life on the Train—Lying as a Pastime—Dinner by the Way—The Kirgises—Colonisation of the Akmolinsk Steppe—Miseries of the Emigrants.

On the Siberian train, which had modern bogey-carriages, we succeeded in getting a comfortable compartment. To the train were attached a large number of vans for "horses and men," which were overcrowded with emigrants. Besides the emigrants, there was nothing that characterised the train as differing in any way from that on any ordinary Russian line. The carriages were comfortable, the passengers of the first and second class were merchants and officials; those of the third class a *mixtum compositum* of all peoples and languages. Life on board, too, was the same as on a Russian train: the passengers bringing with them a pile of bedclothes, a large basket of provisions, tea-set, etc. This causes much crowding, but friction is prevented by common good humour and amiability. As we advanced farther into Siberia, however, things changed somewhat, as we shall see.

The train now carried us very slowly eastward over the

immense lowland steppes of Western Siberia. These lowlands are in reality a continuation of the Ural-Caspian basin, together with which, at a comparatively recent period in the history of the earth, they formed the bottom of a gigantic northern sea, of which remnants still exist in the shape of salt lakes and marshes. The western part of this great level belongs to the river-system of the gigantic Ob. Its declivity towards the Arctic Ocean is very slight. According to the few measurements which have been made in connection with the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway, there are only a few points higher than 450 feet above the level of the Arctic Sea at a distance of many hundreds of miles from the latter; while at most places the height is only about 360 feet. South of the railroad the declivity is likewise very slight. At the almost imperceptible water-parting between the Aral-Caspian basin and the Arctic Ocean the greatest height is hardly more than 900 feet above the level of the sea. East and west through this immense plain the huge forest belt, varying in width from 1000 to 1300 miles, extends from the Ural mountains to the Pacific Ocean, bounded to the north by the ever-frozen tundras and to the south by the steppes.

The western portion of the Trans-Siberian railroad, traversing the steppes from the Ural mountains to the Ob, has a length of 880 miles. This endless plain through which the train carries us, diversified only by salt lakes and marshes, conveys a most cheerless impression. Here and there, however, one sees a grove of birches, all the more welcome

BRIDGE OVER THE TOBOL ON THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

and agreeable from their rarity. Never in my life have I seen such snow-white birch-stems as here, so dazzling against the clear green carpet of the steppes. This region is very sparsely populated (only about five persons to the square mile) by Kirgises and Russian emigrants. [1] From Tschelàbinsk the railroad runs for 161 miles through the Orenburg district, and then follows the border between Tobolsk and the "Steppe-provinces." Between the Irtish and the Ob it crosses the so-called Baratinsky Steppe. The greater part of these immense regions belongs either to the Crown or to the Imperial family, and a considerable area of it has been opened up for colonisation, but some land belongs to the Kossacks.

Life on board the train, as I have said, was characterised by general amiability, though it was sometimes of a little too intimate a nature for the taste of a westerner. I had hardly taken my seat before some one began inquiring: "Where do you come from?" "Where are you going, and what is your business?" "What is your *tschin* (title or caste)?" When it became known that I was going to search for Andrée, such questions as the following were put to me: "How much money have you?... Have you the money by you or in the trunk? What have you in that box, in that leather trunk?" etc. I conversed with

[1] In the two great steppe-provinces of Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk, belonging to the "General Gubernie (province) of the Steppes" with Omsk as its capital, the population, according to the latest official reports, amounts to 1,473,154, of whom 921,458 are Kirgises.

different kinds of persons—merchants, officials, teachers, and peasants—and on different subjects. I soon, however, discovered that the statements of my interlocutors were often as contradictory as they well could be, and that I seldom could rely on my authority. From my experiences in this respect during my travels in Siberia, I feel inclined to think that the somewhat strong opinion of the French traveller, Professor Legras, concerning the way in which truth is treated in Siberia comes very near the mark.

"Among certain classes of society in Siberia," he says, "people lie with enthusiasm for the pleasure of the thing, most often without any personal interest as motive, simply from habit, as a pastime, or from love of the art. If I except a few personal friends who have given me reliable information, I could count on my fingers those persons whom I have not surprised in the very act of trying to cheat and deceive me by wrong statements . . . They lie naïvely, refinedly, or cynically, as it suits them best; they lie with caressing looks and cordial shakings of the hand" . . . This serious moral defect must not, however, be judged too hardly by our western standard; it is, I believe, to be explained by Asiatic conditions which create suspicion between man and man, and make the art of dissimulation a necessary weapon of self-protection of everybody against everybody. In Siberia, where these Asiatic conditions are still more pronounced than in European Russia, this art of lying has assumed repulsive forms—has become, indeed, a kind of popular amusement. The fault is not so much

with the individual as with the *régime* which creates it. I met with several Siberians who warned me of the necessity of being on my guard against the stories about Andrée which would be sure to shower upon me in Siberia, a warning well borne out by subsequent experience.

A purer and nobler pleasure than that of listening to "sailor-yarns" and *chroniques scabreuses* was afforded me by looking out from the platform of the train over the endless steppe with its fresh green of early spring, its brilliant flowers, its groves of birches with their snowy stems. Now and then were seen large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep, watched by Kirgises on horseback, whose silhouettes showed clear against the horizon on the ridge of some hill, calling to mind the times when these free sons of the steppe roamed undisturbed over the endless plains of Siberia. Others would be seen on their speedy horses, surrounded by whirling clouds of dust, coming towards the train, with which they kept up a race for several kilometres, until they finally had to give up the unequal struggle with the iron horse, this invincible intruder which ever more and more is driving away the natives and their herds from their old haunts.

Slowly the train rolls on, jostling and shaking for one, two, or even three hours on end, until a sharp whistling is heard, and yonder, far away on the steppe, is seen a group of low red-painted houses. These are the stations, which are situated about twenty or thirty miles from one another, and two or three perhaps from some village, which is

seldom seen from the line. At each station the train stops from 20 to 45 minutes, as the case may be, at the end of which three signals are given with a bell, and then three whistles with long intervals. Still a few minutes pass after the last signal, and finally the train once more starts quietly on its journey. At every station tea and *vodka* can be had, but regular meals are served only at certain places. When leaving the train at the stations, it is absolutely necessary to hire some one to watch over your baggage, for stealing on the trains is very common. The stations are invariably too small, and there is a great deal of crowding and scrambling to get to the buffet for a glass of tea or vodka, or to get a place at the table, where, as a rule, a long wait is necessary before a more or less cleanly and courteous waiter appears and brings you *stchee* (cabbage soup) and cutlets, which you swallow as quickly as you can, and hurry back to the train to see if your things are all right. The soup with a small piece of meat swimming in it costs about eighteen pence, the cutlets half a crown or three shillings, and a bottle of beer about sevenpence or eight-pence. Considering the low price of meat (three-halfpence a pound), the food at the Siberian railway restaurants is rather dear; moreover its quality does not, as a rule, come up to that of the generally excellent railway restaurants in European Russia. For third-class passengers there is a special buffet, and for the emigrants a "*kipitka*" or cooking-house, where they receive boiling water gratuitously for their tea. As a rule, these passengers never

A TRAIN ON THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

consume anything at the stations except vodka, but only fill their tea-kettles with boiling water and make their tea on board the train.

On the second day of our journey the Kirgises began to make their appearance at the stations and in the third-class carriages, their number increasing more and more the farther east we got. Both men and women wore the common *schapàn* of central Asia, a wide kaftan bordered with sheepskin and reaching to the knees, with a belt about the waist. The men had high and wide boots of red leather on their feet, and Tatar caps edged with fur on their heads.

Their costume, their large bronzed faces with small and somewhat oblique eyes, and their strong and healthy appearance made them easily recognisable among the crowds of emigrants, where, quiet and taciturn, they walked about with that peculiar wagging motion of the body which is characteristic of horsemen, or sat with their bulgy legs a-straddle, curiously regarding the ragged and hunger-stricken crowds of Russians flocking in to occupy their pasture-grounds and push them and their herds more and more out of the plains which their forefathers have occupied from time immemorial. Do these sons of the steppe think of the significance of this invasion, I wonder? Their resigned expression seems only to say, "The will of Allah be done!"

The Russian colonisation of the Kirgis steppe of Akmolinsk began about the middle of the eighteenth century with

the erection (in 1752) of the fort of Petropavlovsk, which through a chain of smaller Kossack forts was connected with the fort of Omsk to the east and with the military lines of Orenburg to the west. Protected by these forts, Russian colonists penetrated farther and farther into the steppe both to the north and south, and occupied the richest and best land. The first colonists were Kossacks who moved in from South Russia. It was not before 1870 that the Russian peasants began to colonise these steppes. This colonisation was partly forced and partly voluntary. In order to people the steppe and Russify the Kirgises the Government selected peasants from European Russia and sent them to places specially assigned for their settlement. [1] Here, however, as well as in other parts of Siberia, official experiments of this kind did not turn out well, owing to the unsuitableness of the places selected for settlement and other causes. The voluntary colonisation, on the other hand, has always succeeded better. During the 27 years between 1869 and 1896 the number of Russian colonists in Akmolinsk has increased from 101,910 to 258,747.

This great influx of immigrants has caused much misery and dissatisfaction both among the Kirgises and the colonists, and officials have been from time to time appointed to settle the troubles by assigning suitable land for colonisation to the colonists and suitable pasture-grounds to the

[1] This administrative colonisation must not be confounded with the exile-system proper, which is quite another thing.

natives. These commissions, however, have not had much success, owing mainly to the fact that the parties concerned—the colonists and the Kirgises—have not had any say in the matter. These steppes, as I have stated, are covered with salt lakes and marshes, and the places where fresh water and arable land exist are needed alike as pasture-grounds for the Kirgises and as homesteads for the colonists. Among the Kirgises has existed from time immemorial a well-defined system of tribal land-ownership or rather right of occupation, which has worked very well, and the breaking up of this system, of course, is accompanied by much misery and suffering. At present commissions are at work with the aim of finding out how far the steppes of western Siberia may be made suitable for colonisation by the aid of artesian wells, and experiments of this kind are being made, though with what success is not yet known. Owing to the fact that the black soil of the steppes of this region—as far as is known—is in many places thin and consists mainly of turf, it is either not suitable for cultivation at all or is very soon exhausted. This soil, which cannot bear comparison with the rich black soil of Russia, necessarily requires an intensive culture, which, under present circumstances and at great distances from centres of population, is not possible in Siberia, excepting in a few districts near the western border.

The overwhelming tide of famine-stricken immigrants is, of course, creating untold misery among hundreds of thousands of these poor people in a land with such a severe

climate as Siberia. To alleviate this misery a noble band of self-sacrificing volunteers are at work at the several "emigration-points," and large sums of money are also assigned by the authorities for relief; but all this work is like emptying the sea with a bucket, for tens of thousands are every year carried off by want, exposure, and epidemics. A strip of land 100 versts wide alongside the railroad is entirely set apart for colonisation, and the emigrants settling there seem to be best cared for.

Of the towns of Kurgan, Petropavlovsk, and Omsk, situated respectively on the rivers Tobol, Ischim, and Irtish, we could see only the spires of the churches and the roofs of the highest buildings, for the line always runs at a distance of some versts from the towns. The last named town, Omsk, is the most important, not only as "the capital of the steppes," but also for its situation on the river Irtish, which puts it in communication with China, and thus promises it a great future as a commercial centre.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HEART OF SIBERIA.

The Press in Siberia—Robberies and Murders—The "*Podsnièshniks*"—The Ob Bridge—*Poskotina* and *Zaimki*—Development of the Communal System—The New-comer and the old Settler—We reach Tomsk.

AT Omsk I got the first fresh newspaper, "*Stepnoi Krai*" (The Steppe-Region), published the previous day in Omsk, and also a number of older Siberian journals. At once I laid aside my old papers from Moscow and St. Petersburg, eager to see what my new acquaintances were like. The position of the press in Russia is not enviable, and it is still less so in Siberia. The starting of a newspaper in this latter country is connected with so many formalities and difficulties that a western editor would hang himself in despair before he had gone through half of them and had time to begin to think of editing the first number. And having got so far, he would be only at the beginning of his tribulations. For the Siberian newspapers are subjected not only to the "general censure," but also to the "local censure," which is under the control of the respective governors. And this purgatory is a hot one. Not one article, not one notice, nay, not even the advertisements

are exempt from the crucial fire. And there is no appeal. If the censor chance to be an educated person and consistent in his severity, the editor may somehow steer his craft between rocks and shallows with possible safety, but if, as often is the case, he is an ignoramus without education, mutilating every article with his clumsy red pencil, then the patience of the editor is indeed put to a severe test. If he refuses to print such a mutilated article, then he risks serious consequences for such obstinacy. If, by dint of exceptional skill in writing between the lines, he succeeds in getting an article passed which is afterwards considered to have "a dangerous influence" or a "tendency to be hurtful," his paper may run the risk of being entirely suppressed,—a common enough episode in Siberian journalism.

It is no wonder then, under such circumstances, that in all Siberia there are only about half-a-dozen newspapers, and that all have a hard struggle for existence in more senses than one. It is consequently with no little sympathy and admiration that one reads such very well-written productions (even from a western standpoint) as the "*Stepnoi Krai*," "*Sibirskaya Zhisn*" (Siberian Life) and "*Vostotschnoye Obozrenye*" (Eastern Review), in which sometimes, if you know how to read between the lines, you will perchance discover criticisms of matters which the press of European Russia dares not even touch upon.

With great curiosity I now studied the contents of my new purchases, for in a way they gave me a better and more correct idea of Siberian life than I could otherwise

have got in my hurried journey through the country. What struck me at the first glance were the long columns filled with notices of robberies and murders. Here, for example, is a notice of a herd of cattle and horses having been lifted on the steppe, there another of a daring burglary, followed by a list of several robberies and murders which had taken place in open daylight, and of travellers who had been attacked and killed by brigands, etc. And these events did not strike the Siberians as anything abnormal. To them they were common occurrences. In a town of some 30,000 inhabitants—Krasnoyarsk to wit—about 50 robberies with murder were said to occur annually. Another subject occupying much space in these newspapers was the distress among the immigrants and the lack of well-organised relief. The occurrence of 3000 cases of disease among a single week's importation of these wretched people was noted, and it was reported that there were 15,000 persons crowded together at one "emigration point" on the Ob, waiting for transport, etc. There were also notices and articles about the way in which the poor colonists fell into the hands of usurers and low-class lawyers, reducing them to abject poverty; and others about the constant collisions occurring between the old and the new settlers. Another subject which was discussed in these papers was the lack of popular education and how to provide for this. One paper complained that in Irkutsk, where living is exorbitantly dear, a school-teacher received a salary of only 16 to 21 roubles a month, and that only about one quarter

of the children of school-age received any instruction whatever. Another commented upon the report that 700 new churches were to be erected for the immigrants, by quoting the fact that in some provinces only one child out of 18 received any instruction, and even that was often of a very inferior nature.

Between Omsk and Ob I met a Siberian newspaper-editor from Tomsk, who showed much interest in our expedition. To my enquiry as to the report spread in Europe *viâ* Rome during the previous winter, that three dead foreigners had been found somewhere in Siberia, he replied that it was a very common affair for corpses to be found in the forests of Siberia, but he had never heard of any discovery of this nature which could be connected in any way with the Andrée Expedition. If Andrée and his comrades had been found dead or alive, the fact would certainly have become known, as they would easily have been identified. During the spring, he said, when the snow commences to melt, a large number of corpses of "unknown persons" are found in the forests near the roads in the vicinity of villages and cities. These "unknown persons" are either escaped prisoners who have perished from exposure, or else persons who have been murdered; and these finds of corpses are so common that they are called by the people "*podsnièshniks*" (snow-flowers). This Andrée report was explained in the same way by other Siberians.

From the bridge over the Ob, 875 yards in length, we had a magnificent view of the great river, now filled with

masses of drifting ice. At this point we entered the central section of the Trans-Siberian railway between Ob and Irkutsk, which has a length of 1136 miles. The line now runs for about 120 miles through an undulating forest-clad country, the beautiful natural park-region forming the transition between the thick virgin forest and the steppe, and then the train plunges into the "*taigà*", as the virgin forest of Siberia is called.

In this park-like region, with its natural meadows mingled with groves of cedar, pine, and birch, are seen, between the sparse huts of the new settlers, the large enclosures of the old colonists. These so-called "*poskotina*" (from *skot* = cattle) and the "*zaimki*" or "occupations" will ere long belong only to history. The Russian colonists have always settled in groups, and not on single farms widely separated from one another, as did the colonists of America and Australia. The reasons for this are to be found both in the gregarious instinct of the Slav and in the necessity for common protection against the attacks of hostile natives and bands of robbers. As long as there was a superfluity of land the immigrants settled wherever they pleased, enclosing a common pasture-ground, i.e. forming a "*poskotina*", which would sometimes comprise sixteen square miles or more. Early in the spring, or in the fall when the crops had been gathered in, the cattle would also be pastured on the cultivated and sometimes specially enclosed fields. The Russian communal ownership of the soil has also been introduced into Siberia. At first this was limited

to the pasture-grounds, which all settlers had the same duty to enclose and the same right to use; but later it was extended even to the cultivated land. In consequence of the great superfluity of land in Siberia, only the most primitive system of agriculture—"a system of pillage and plunder"—has been followed, and the soil

A GLIMPSE FROM THE TRAIN.

being as a rule much less fertile than in Europe, it is very soon exhausted.

The colonist now simply leaves his exhausted piece of land and commences to exhaust another piece. When all his land within the enclosure is thus worked out, he goes beyond its borders and finds out the most fertile spots, which he ploughs and reaps until they in their turn are

exhausted. A Siberian colonist of the old type may thus have twenty different pieces of cultivated land scattered far and wide in the forest, some of them, perhaps, as much as a dozen miles away from his home. Finally, the long journeys to and fro between his home and these scattered plots taking too much time and trouble, he builds a hut for himself and an enclosure for the cattle, and spends part of the year at some of his occupied places. This is then called a "*zaimka*" or occupation. Sometimes it happens that, finding sufficient fertile soil, he moves away entirely to the new place. Others, perhaps, will come after him, and thus a new "*olstschina*" (community) arises.

In such a system of free occupation and "plundering" of the soil conflicts will often, of course, arise between the colonists, and these conflicts *en dernier ressort* are usually settled by the community, which thus asserts its fundamental right of ownership to the land. "The community is the possessor and distributor of the land."

A strong animosity exists between the old settlers and the new, the former considering the latter as intruders, and not without reason, for with the influx of the famine-stricken masses from Russia the comparatively well-to-do old Siberian peasantry will be reduced to poverty. The newcomers settling within the borders of an old settlement have each the right of obtaining some 38 acres of land, which means that the old settlers are deprived of a corresponding area of their land with little or no recompense for it. To retaliate for this intrusion the members of

the old peasant-communities compel the new-comer to pay about 150 roubles for the right of membership in the community, without which he is not allowed to settle within its border. New-comers who form independent communities of their own avoid this outlay, but very often fall into the hands of "lawyers" and usurers instead. The immigrants in their turn take revenge for the real or imagined wrongs suffered at the hands of the "*tscheldón*" (a nickname of the old settlers). Many of these are sectarians or political offenders of some kind, whose previous life-history has some vulnerable point, of which the new-comers are not slow to avail themselves. Sometimes they denounce a rich sectarian before the police, or the ecclesiastical authorities; at another time they report an "unreliable" political in order to get him banished and occupy his land and house. In this they sometimes succeed, and thus the "system of denunciation" is freely practised. The sectarians in their turn accuse the new-comers, and not without reason, of disturbing the good order of the communities by introducing drunkenness, stealing, and immorality, which were unknown before their arrival, and ask to be delivered from the intruders. In the end it not unfrequently happens that entire sectarian communities are thus compelled to leave their old homes and move away into the wilderness.

From the station of Taiga, situated in the midst of the principal forest, a branch-line runs 56 miles to the city of Tomsk, where I made a short visit to deliver a valuable

gift from Baron Nordenskjöld to the University of Tomsk in the shape of a scientific collection. The railway station of Tomsk, like almost all Siberian railway stations, is situated a few miles outside the town, to which a road leads which in dirtiness vies with the streets of Tomsk itself. Beautifully situated on the river Tom, and having several large public buildings, among which the University is the most prominent, the town would make a pleasant impression if it were not for the horrible dirt prevailing everywhere - in the streets, in the stores, in all public places. Time—perhaps fortunately—did not permit us to stay in Tomsk more than one day.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE FOREST-REGION.

Krasnoyarsk and the Yenisei—Delayed at Tulun—By Tarantass on the Old Siberian Road—The Taiga—Its Influence on the Settler—Bad Characters—The typical Siberian Village—Its Inhabitants—A Night Adventure.

FROM Taiga to the town of Krasnoyarsk, situated on the western shore of the Yenisei, the railroad runs more than 300 miles through the virgin forest, until, not far from the latter town, it comes once more into the open country. The bridge over the Yenisei not yet being ready, we had to cross the river, together with our luggage, in a rickety old boat rowed by prisoners, and this was not done without danger, owing to the strong current and the floating ice.

At the time of our journey the railroad was not officially opened further than to the Yenisei. East of this river, however, the new road was nevertheless trafficked as far as Tulun, a distance of 430 miles. Having learnt that property was not secure on this section of the line, thefts constantly occurring, I was anxious to obtain a special car for our expedition. This, I am glad to say, was granted me, thanks to the kindness of the chief of the district, who also sent us a man to watch our things.

KRASNOYARSK.

Leaving the Yenisei we ran for a long distance through the exceedingly lovely valley of Beresovka with its natural parks and charming meadows, surrounded by picturesque mountains. Soon, however, the train again plunges into the mysterious and gloomy taiga, which, only here and there broken by a river, and the two little towns, Khansk and Nishni Udinsk, continues to the present terminus of traffic at Tulun, and for hundreds of miles beyond.

From Tulun to Irkutsk there remained a distance of about 250 miles for us to travel by means of horses. A large number of passengers and piles of goods were crowded into the former place, waiting for conveyance eastward, and we also had to stay here for three days in consequence, and would have had to wait still longer had we not met with such cordial help from some of the engineers. Having bought a *tarantass* (a long travelling coach with wooden springs) and two *telegas* or carts for our equipment, we left Tulun, accompanied by a man going to Irkutsk, who had been recommended to us to serve as a kind of guide and as guard of our equipment. In Siberia etiquette forbids all inquiries as to a person's previous history, but I understood that there had been some kind of hitch in our guide's career, and our experience proved that there were still some defects in his conception of the difference between mine and thine.

We now exchanged the rail and steam for the small but tough Siberian post-horse, and started eastward on the great historical Siberian road, which during more than two

centuries has been trodden by a million prisoners, the clanking of whose chains has echoed against the dark walls of the gloomy forest through which they march.

In a quarter of an hour we were again in the taiga. If you want to know Siberia and the Siberians, you must first get acquainted with the taiga, which occupies such a vast area of the country and exerts so strong an influence on the character and the habits of its people. Before we proceed further on our journey therefore, it will be worth while for me to try and give some idea of it.

It is difficult from our knowledge of European forests to form any just conception of the Siberian taiga. Our tree-covered areas, however large they may be, are limited by fields and villages; in a word, they are controlled by man. But no human hand controls the Siberian taiga. Dark and almost impenetrable it covers a marshy lowland extending more than 4500 miles from east to west, and from 1000 to 1500 miles from south to north. In this endless monotony there is no change, no variety. You may travel hundreds and thousands of miles without seeing a human habitation, or any living creature other than wild animals or perhaps some stray Tungus or Ostiak. Only by means of the great rivers and their tributaries may civilised man penetrate this gigantic wilderness, whose inmost depths have never been trodden by the foot of any human being, for even the natives keep near the rivers. The taiga as yet rules supreme and bids defiance to the explorer.

The taiga has its secret, which it hides in its sombre

depths, and the wanderer penetrating into its dark recesses is overpowered by its mysterious gloom and majesty. Only when you travel through it on the iron track behind the all-subduing iron horse, which hinders all intimate intercourse with nature and destroys all poetry, you do not feel its conquering power. But it is otherwise when you are in close touch with it. I have travelled through the taiga in the summer some 500 miles in a tarantass. I have followed the course of the gigantic Lena through it for three thousand miles to the Arctic Ocean, and for twelve hundred miles and more I have sledged through its gloomy depths in winter. In the bright summer Arctic nights I have wandered through it in search of the mossy graves of the Shamans. And everywhere I have felt the powerful influence and fascination it exerts.

It is a clear spring evening on the upper Lena. In the indefinite light of the Arctic spring we direct our steps from the river into the huge forest. All is dark and gloomy. Only a few streaks of pale, cold light filter through the dark green vault of thick branches. We are in a world of big and rugged cedars, dark Siberian spruces, the stately pyramids of the northern pine and the Siberian larch-tree, the belle of these northern forests. In front of us looms a wall of dark pine which we with great difficulty penetrate, making our way through the under-brush over moist green moss and trunks of fallen trees. At length we come to a small river forming an opening in the dark wall, which again closes behind us to hide its secret. Around us is

the overwhelming silence of the taiga. You hear only the throbbing of your heart, the sound of your own footsteps. An indescribable feeling of mystery and awe creeps over you in the twilight of the spring night among the motionless and mute forms which surround you. It is as if you were wandering in some cold and sombre temple, the pale light filtering down between the branches as through high clerestory windows, and the tall stems oppressing one's very soul like some huge and towering wall.

We continue our way and finally emerge into a little open space, the bleak sky of the spring night above us, from which a few pale stars look down upon the weird and lonely scene. We sit down and listen. Far away is heard the monotonous cry of some bird, like the sound of a solitary worshipper in the great temple, constantly repeating his plaintive prayer... Listen! A deep sigh quivers through the taiga, a light trembling flutters the crown of the stately aspen hard by, and a feeble current of air carries to us the strong, clean scent of the pines.

It is a few weeks later on the lower Lena. The night sky is lighter, but it is covered with fleecy clouds. Our steamer is lying at anchor in a protected bay, and I land for a stroll in the taiga, which here is thin and more monotonous in character. The cedar, the spruce, and the northern pine have ceased long ago. Only the hardy Siberian larch-tree is left besides the birch, the willow, and the alder. Over a carpet of bog-myrtle and various mosses I wander for miles into the depth of the great forest.

Suddenly in a grove of larch-trees I come upon two Shaman graves, constructed of hollowed-out stems of trees resting on a wooden scaffolding, the poles of which are ornamented by rough images of birds placed upon their summits. [1]

As I sit down to look on these solitary graves, which hold the remnants of the seers of the taiga, a loud groaning sound comes up from the far distance, growing rapidly in volume as it approaches, nearing and nearing till it moves among the tops of the trees around me, which it shakes and tears at viciously, finally dying away in the endless stretch of forest behind. A short pause, and from another direction my ear catches the sound as from a choir of instruments out of tune, increasing to a wild and hideous howl. The taiga is roaring with rage at the intrusion of the stranger, or perchance the spirits of its prophets are angry with the audacious one who has ventured to tread the sacred groves of their last resting-place.[2]

Such to the traveller, perhaps, the taiga may appear—a gigantic prison or a pandemonium of howling spirits; but to the first immigrant from "little mother" Russia, it presented itself as a new world of struggle for life, a stern reality which remodelled his life and character. He brought with him the memory of merry scenes on the shores of the

[1] The Shamanists always bury their dead above ground, because beneath the surface of the earth is the abode of evil spirits.

[2] According to the Shamanistic belief, the Spirits of the Shamans are always hovering about their graves, and no Shamanist ever ventures to walk in their vicinity.

Volga, he brought with him his good-natured sociability, the songs and the legends of his native land. I see him in the midst of the taiga, whither he has gone alone to hunt and trap. By-and-by he is subdued by his surroundings. He feels no inclination to smile, and no songs now pass his lips—the voice of man sounds too strange in the death-silence of the endless forest, or is swallowed up by its wildly roaring music. He sees neither the rising nor the setting of the sun. It appears to him above one dark, impenetrable wall, and sets behind another alike sombre and gloomy. Wherever he looks, his eye only falls upon the mossy trunks, and the dark branches of the spruce. And with this his spiritual horizon also becomes more and more limited. Day by day he finds it more difficult to break through the dark circle which surrounds him and his home. The old songs are silenced, the old memories wither away and die, the old legends are forgotten. He is no longer the talkative and sociable Russian mujik; he becomes uncommunicative and gloomy: his look is no longer open and steady, but shy and restless like that of some wild beast looking for its prey.

But these first immigrants to the Siberian forests, leading the life of semi-nomads, had to fight not only with nature, but also with hostile natives and brigands, which helped to develop in them the instincts of the wild beast rather than human feelings. They not only hunted the natives like wild animals, but, under the influence of drink, often fought and killed one another for trifles. One of the prin-

cipal causes of these sanguinary conflicts among themselves was the lack of women. Families were few in number, and those parents that had daughters would not give them away in marriage, because they needed them for work at home. Then there was an ukase promulgated, ordering parents to marry their daughters at the risk of severe punishment in case of refusal, and girls who refused to be married were to be beaten with birch boughs. As in ancient times, expeditions were undertaken to the villages of the natives in order to rob them of their girls, yet the lack of women still continued, and so did also the murderous feuds. It was a common occurrence not only for neighbours to kill one another, but also for men to kill their wives from jealousy, and the wives their husbands. These traits of character, it is true, have been modified somewhat in later years, but among the genuine "*tscheldòn*," or old Siberian settlers, they still prevail.

Between Tulun and Irkutsk we travelled night and day, except when we had to wait for horses. During the day the sun was hidden by clouds of smoke, and at night the forest was here and there lit up by immense forest-fires, in the fierce glare of which would now and then be seen groups of rag-covered *brodyagi* or tramps, whose look was more picturesque than reassuring. At intervals of fifteen or twenty miles we would come to a village with a *stantsia* or posting-station, where our horses were changed.

These Siberian villages make a peculiar impression on

the traveller. The first thing that strikes him is the absence of open fields about them. One comes suddenly out of the forest into the village street, and plunges again into the virgin forest once more. The villagers have their plots of cultivated land scattered far and wide in valleys or open places in the forest. Seldom does one see barns, sheds for the cattle, or enclosures of any kind, even these being in the forests. Moreover, the inhabitants of the villages on the great Siberian road have not devoted themselves much to agriculture. Founded by command to serve as posting-stations, many of the villages are situated in places quite unsuitable for agriculture, and their inhabitants have spent most of their time on the box-seat. With the opening of the railroad many of these villages will be ruined.

Surrounded by the forest as by a dense wall, the villages consist almost invariably of two rows of houses lying one on each side of the road, and extend sometimes to a length of three or four miles. In the middle or at one end the gloomy and weather-beaten station-prison towers above the rest of the houses, with its courtyard surrounded by a high wooden fence. This *étape-prison* dominates the settlement, which is only its attribute, its child, on which it impresses its character. In the centre of the village may be seen a couple of two-storeyed houses with a drinking-saloon or a store on the lower floor. On either hand stretches the long row of one-storeyed houses or huts, gray or black from exposure to the hard climate or from

smoke. The further away from the centre, the smaller and more poor-looking do these houses and huts become, till they reach the forest as mere earth-covered yurtas. The inhabitants of these *izbas* and huts are the foster-children of the prison, which they have more or less recently left, and year after year this row of huts increases.

The villages present a many-coloured picture of different nationalities, costumes, and architectures. Beside the Russian *izba* with its ornamented window-frames you see the earthen hut of the *Bashkir* with its open fire-place instead of the Russian oven, and the ox-bladder in lieu of glass for window-pane. You note the Asiatic summer kaftan worn by the *Sibiriak* in his high boots, the black suit of the modern city-dweller, and the *beschmet* of the Tatar. And these different elements have evidently not entered into any organised union, but are only by outward forces pressed together into a loose conglomerate. Each man lives his own life. Even if the South-Russian wears the Asiatic kaftan, he is none the less a South-Russian; the gipsy has not commenced to wash his dark face; and the chaotic sounds of ten different languages strike your ear as you saunter down the street.

On our way to Irkutsk we met with many Siberians of the old type. If I happened in conversation with them to say: "You Russians," they would exclaim: "We are not Russians, we are Siberians!" Their self-asserting, independent manners, which sometimes bordered on impudence, contrasted sharply with the servility of the Russian peasants.

They did not hesitate to demand 20 roubles as hire for a distance which, according to the official tax, would cost a fifth of that sum, and when I showed them my recommendation from the Minister of the Interior, according to which they were in duty bound to provide horses at the regular price, they replied with a shrug, and told me that all the post-horses were out, and that they were free men, independent of all orders from St. Petersburg.

Although we had a man with us to watch our things, and also, when we had to stop anywhere for the night, hired someone to act as guard, yet the spare wooden shafts for our carts, various ropes and clothes, etc. were stolen. At the time of our journey two travellers had been robbed and murdered close to one of the settlements. In a small village where there seemed to be a great many questionable characters, we had to spend the night waiting for horses, and Mr. Frænkel and myself slept in the tarantass. About two o'clock in the morning I awoke, as the tarantass started at a tremendous pace away from the village. Not finding our third companion, Mr. Nilson, in the coach, I cried out to the driver to stop, but he merely increased his speed still more, and only when Mr. Frænkel put a revolver to his head did he pull up and return to the posting-station, where Mr. Nilson was soundly sleeping. Our "guide" was also pretending to sleep, although there were reasons for believing that he was not ignorant of the scheme of driving our coach out of the village into the forest, while we were sleeping, in order to

rob me of the money which he very well knew that I always carried on my person. It was afterwards found out that a number of ruffians had gone to the forest before the driver started with our coach. There was no representative of the police to be found in the place—he being reported to be away—and when we started at daybreak we saw a group of "*brodyagi*" waiting by the roadside as we drove past them at a gallop, revolver in hand—I having warned the driver that I would report him to the police if he did not drive quickly through the forest.

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE BURIATIC STEPPE.

In Irkutsk—Buriat Villages—History of the Buriats—Communism—Shamanism—Buddhist Missionaries—The "Buriatisation" of the Russians—Dorschi Bantsaroff—A Gifted Race.

On the 13th of May we arrived at Irkutsk, "the white city," beautifully situated on the river Angarà about 44 miles west of its outlet from Lake Baikal. Here we spent three days to have our instruments repaired, as some of them had been broken by the jolting of the *telegas*. We also had to complete our equipment, and to get letters of introduction from the Governor-General.

During our stay here I was very busy by day in getting everything ready for our voyage to the north, while by night I was fully engaged in fighting the vermin at the principal hotel of the city where we had put up. The Governor-General received me very kindly, not only giving me the necessary mandates and introductions, but also sending telegraphic orders to the village authorities between Irkutsk and the upper Lena to have horses ready for the conveyance of our expedition.

In Irkutsk they did not know whether trappers had visited

ON THE ROAD TO IRKUTSK.

the New Siberian Islands or not during 1897 or in the spring of 1898, nor was any other information obtainable which could justify a change in our plans. The prominent firm of Gromoff, owners of the steamer *Lena*, which accompanied the *Vega* on her memorable voyage round northern Asia, accordingly kindly promised to transport our expedition on this steamer from the city of Yakutsk to the Lena delta, if we could reach Yakutsk in time. The *Lena* was to start from Yakutsk about the middle of June. The distance between Irkutsk and Yakutsk is about 2000 miles, of which 250 have to be made by road to the upper Lena, and the remainder by *lodka* or steamer down the river.

On the 15th of May we left Irkutsk. The road runs through a forest-clad country gently rising towards the highland steppes which extend westward from Lake Baikal. Having passed the forest-region, we enter the so-called Buriatic Steppe. On each side of the road, scattered here and there over the steppe, are seen the Buriatic *ulus* or villages. An *Ulu* is, literally, a group of families *(ail)* constituting a tribe or part of a tribe *(aimak)*. The *yurtas* or cabins of the families are not built in regular rows like the houses of the Russian villages, but are scattered in picturesque confusion and surrounded by a large common enclosure. At a distance from the village are the so-called "*ugugi*"—immense enclosures where the cattle graze in winter and whence in summer-time the Buriats gather splendid crops of hay. By the side of the houses are seen high poles resembling maypoles. On these are hung sacri-

ficial gifts to the Buriatic divinities in the shape of goat-skins with head and horns attached, rags, and different kinds of clothing.

Besides the villages, in which they spend the winter, the Buriats have their summer stations, between which they move with their herds of cattle. Up to the beginning of this century they lived only in yurtas or earth-cabins; but now well-to-do Buriats have comfortable houses, and only a few families live in yurtas.

The so-called Barga-Buriats live in the government of Irkutsk, and the Mongolian-Buriats in Transbaikalia. They have all come from Mongolia, whence they probably were driven by some nomadic people *(neutcha)*. The history of the Buriats before they were conquered by the Russians is, however, only legendary; and very little has been done to investigate their past. With certainty it is known only that they have never played any prominent part in the history of eastern Asia, and that at the time of Jenghis Khan they lived in the regions surrounding Lake Baikal, where they live to-day. According to Buriatic legends a "Batyr", Bachak-Irban, served at the court of Sian Khan, who from jealousy resolved to punish him in a most cruel manner. But Bachak-Irban gathered together the Buriats and led them northwards to the land of Agan Tsagan Khan. Here they encountered the Yakuts, whom they drove northwards. At the invasion of the Russians about 1740 the Buriats were the only occupants of the country. The horrible cruelties of the Russian *voyevodes*

(military chiefs) compelled a large number of Buriats to flee back to Mongolia, where, however, they only fell from the frying-pan into the fire, and had to return to their country again, because at that time the cruel Haldan Khan was spreading terror all over Mongolia.

At the present time the Buriats are divided into tribes *(aimaki)*. Until 1886 a group of such tribes were under the administration of a council, at the head of which was an hereditary chief. The jurisdiction of this council was very extensive. In 1887 reforms began to be introduced. In Transbaikalia the old council was let alone, but among the Buriats in the province of Irkutsk a system of administration was introduced corresponding to that of the Russian village-districts. Among all the natives of Siberia the Buriats have best preserved the ancient custom of the community of goods. A poor Buriat, for example, has the right to receive food or shelter from his well-to-do brethren. When a Buriat kills game, his neighbours first receive their share of the meat, and the host gets only what is left. In like manner the Buriat girl simply goes to the village smith and selects metal ornaments for her hair and dress without paying; and the crops on the fields are gathered in by the community, each member of which has the right to take what he needs from the common store. This principle of communism also finds expression in the large communal hunting-parties which at certain periods take place and are accompanied by great festivities.

On the Buriatic Steppe we first saw in the twilight of the

northern spring night the fantastic forms of the Shaman Mountains, the principal sanctuary of the Buriats, while in the clear sky the "*tengerin-oedol*", i.e. "the road of the gods", (the milky way) glittered over our heads.

Until the beginning of the 18th century the Buriats, like all the peoples of northern Asia belonging to the eastern branches of the Ural-Altaic group (i.e. all the Tungus, Mongol, and Turki tribes), were members of the so-called *lhòro* religion, or what we generally call Shamanism. At the time of the advent of the Dai-Tsin dynasty to the throne of the Chinese Empire, Shamanism was introduced in China under the name of *Tjao-Shen*, but the new religion did not meet with any success there. The fact, however, deserves to be mentioned, because in China was published in 1747, in the Manchu language, a description of the ceremonies of Shamanism, which is the only printed account existing of the ancient religion of the Mongols.

In 1727 Buddhist missionaries came to Mongolia and converted the Transbaikalian Buriats and the inhabitants of the Tungkin valley to Buddhism, which, however, became very much mixed up with Shamanism. At one time the Buddhist monasteries in Transbaikalia and the southern parts of Irkutsk were counted by hundreds. At present their number is much smaller. These Buddhist missionaries exerted a great civilising influence on the Buriats by introducing the art of writing among them, and by translating several Tibetan religious books into the Mongolian language. At the present time the Buddhist monastery at

the Goose Lake is the most important, and there resides the chief of the Siberian adherents of the Lama faith, Bandilo-chambo-lama. At the same place is a library containing a very valuable collection of books and manuscripts in the Tibetan and Mongolian languages. Great annual religious festivals also take place at this monastery.

Part of the Buriats, the so-called *Yasátchni* (tributary), having married Russian women, belong nominally to the orthodox Russian Church, although secretly continuing their sacrifices to the Shaman divinities. The pagan Buriats have also to some degree been influenced by the official Russian religion, and the Shamans sometimes use the sign of the Cross at their pagan ceremonies. The natives have learned from the Russians better agricultural methods and how to build better houses.

On the other hand, the Russian settlers here have to a great extent become "Buriatised", as the Russians in Yakutsk have been "Yakutised". This is to be seen not only in physical changes of the Russian type—the dark colour of hair, eyes, and skin, and the Mongolian or Tatarian facial traits characterising the old Russian population in Siberia—but also in their habits and ideas. Thus, both here and in Yakutsk, the old Russian settlers and their descendants have forgotten their mother-tongue, and speak only the Buriat and Yakut languages, or some kind of mixed tongue. Their Russian orthodoxy has also become very much weakened, many of them cherishing stronger faith in the powers of the Shaman than in the ceremonies of the Russian priest.

The Buriats and the Yakuts are the only natives in Siberia who do not show any signs of dying out, but on the contrary are increasing. Among the Buriats illiteracy is much less than among the peasants of European Russia, and from this gifted people have even sprung some prominent scientists. Among the last-named deserves to be mentioned the learned Buriat, Dorschi Bantsaroff, who, in spite of his wide and thorough learning, remained faithful to the religion of his forefathers until his death.

The wide cultivated fields, the large herds of cattle, and the comparatively well-built Buriat villages testified to the general prosperity and good order existing among these interesting natives. The deep-rooted national feeling, and the resistance they have made against the innovations of their conquerors also prove the strong vitality of this sturdy people. With steady persistence they have fought for their rights against the intrusion of the immigrants. In this fight their knowledge of reading and writing has been of great service to them. Well acquainted with the history of their country, they always use an elaborate apparatus of official documents, proving their right to the lands which the authorities want them to give up for colonisation, and which more and more are being wrested from them in defiance of all justice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UPPER LENA.

Katschùga and Schigàlova—Steamers on the River—*Pauski*—We commence our Voyage—Configuration of the Lena Valley—Its Size and its Tributaries—Scenery—Ust Kutsk and its History—"Gold-Barons" on the Steamer—Kirensk.

HAVING passed the Buriat Steppe, we reached the forest line at Katschùga, and here for the first time, about 120 miles north of its source, we saw the river Lena whose course we were to follow for a distance of over 3000 miles to the Arctic Ocean.[1]

At highest water the Lena is navigable by small steamers up to Katschùga, at which place a large number of craft are built every year for the transport of goods down the river. The flood season was, however, past when we arrived, and we were obliged to continue our journey by road to Schigàlova. The scenery was picturesque and in places

[1] Concerning the entire length of the river Lena, which as yet has never been properly measured, the calculations of different authorities vary. It is estimated at between 3000 and 4000 miles. The length of the navigable part, from Schigàlova to the sea, is calculated by some at 3120 miles and by others at 2925 miles. The Vitim, which is called only a tributary of the Lena, is considered to be about 200 miles longer than the latter. The Lena has its origin in 54° N. lat., at a height of 2855 ft. above the sea, near the western shore of Lake Baikal; the sources of the Vitim are east of Baikal.

magnificent. Now and again the road runs near the river at the foot of overhanging crags, while at other places it leads over heights whence one looks over wide stretches of a forest-clad mountainous country. On the 28th of May we reached Schigàlova. The steamer by which we had expected to go from here part of the way to Yakutsk not having yet arrived, we were obliged to wait and see whether by any chance some other vessel would turn up, for if not we should be compelled to make the voyage in a *lodka*, a sort of open wherry, though sometimes partly covered in aft. After some delay it was discovered that the steamer we were waiting for had run aground some 80 miles north of Schigàlova. Happily, however, after a few days, another steamer turned up, and in her we thankfully started on our way northwards.

Schigàlova is a remarkably busy place in the spring, being the main starting-point of the navigation down the Lena. At present there are about 20 steamers on the river, of which the largest number run between Schigàlova and the gold-fields of Vitim and Olekma. Three or four go to the city of Yakutsk, but only one—namely, the above-mentioned *Lena*, is strong enough to stand the storms which make navigation on the river below Yakutsk so dangerous, and every summer she makes two or three trips between Yakutsk and the Lena delta—a distance of about 1250 miles. In addition to the steamers, a large number of various craft are used for transporting goods or prisoners down the river. Most of these are the so-called

"*pauski.*" A *pausk*, being a special product of this part of the world, needs perhaps a moment's description. It is a floating shop, a drinking saloon, and a cargo-boat at one and the same time, and its appearance and construction are peculiar. The bottom is flat, and constructed of heavy timbers; the sides are perpendicular and made of clumsy planks, sawn by hand. The deck—or roof, as it might be more accurately called—is slightly rounded. The stern is as square as the end of a house, and the bows form an obtuse angle. Viewed from above, the craft strongly resembles a box-iron, . The cargo is placed in the middle, the shop and the saloon occupy the forecastle, while aft are to be found the kitchen and the sleeping-places. These craft stop at the villages and towns selling their goods, or are towed up the rivers Vitim and Olekma to the gold-fields. Having reached their destination, they are sold as building-material or fuel, and the merchants return southwards in the fall by steamer. Besides the *pauski* there are other kinds of boats—a sort of barge, and the *kayuks*, which are provided with mast and sails, and resemble primitive and old-fashioned fishing-smacks. In not one of these vessels, from the smallest to the largest, is there a single nail or bolt. All are fastened by wooden pegs only, and all the planks and knees are sawn by hand.

On the 1st of June we started on our way down the gigantic Lena on the small steamer *Synok*. In sailing down the river you get the impression that you are passing through a mountainous country. On each side a continuous

mountain-wall towers up to the height of 1000 feet above the water, in some places approaching the river, forming picturesque "gates" or "pillars", at others diverging from it, and enclosing large river-basins with numerous islands.

CHALK CLIFFS ON THE LENA.

But if you ascend any of these apparent mountains, you will find that they resolve themselves into a plateau of undulating forest-clad country, through which the giant river has cut its way. Only in two places has the Lena carved

a path for itself through mountain-chains—at Scherebinsk, about 1050 miles south of Yakutsk (near the border between Irkutsk and Yakutsk), and at the most northern part of its course, where it has eroded its deep channel through the Kara Ulak mountains, which form the most northern outskirts of the Verkhoyansk chain.

Between Katschùga and Kirensk the plateau-land through which the Lena has carved its deep and tortuous channel consists mainly of horizontal layers of red sandstone and slate-marl. At Kirensk the layers of upper-silurian sandstone begin to appear, generally feebly folded. Below the river Aldan, more than 60 miles north of the city of Yakutsk, the course of the Lena lies through a flat country, built up from mesozoic rocks, while towards the mouth of the river carboniferous, brachiopod, and coralliferous layers appear.

It is impossible to convey by words and figures any idea of the gigantic proportions of this superb river. Every second it empties into the ocean 10,000 tons of water, which, through its myriad tributaries, it receives from an area of one million square miles, or about five times the size of Great Britain and Ireland. The greatest part of the area drained by the river lies east of it, the water-parting between the Yenisei and the Lena running so far east that it nearly touches the shores of the latter at Kirensk, where the Lower Tunguskaya takes its rise only some ten miles east of the Lena. The principal tributaries of the Lena on its eastern side, counting from the south, are the following:—the Vitim, about 1100 miles in length, of which 300

are navigable; the Olekma, more than 1100 miles in length, navigable about 560 miles; and the Aldan, 1360 miles in length, and navigable for over 900 miles; the Aldan having in its turn two large tributaries, the Amga and Maya. The latter, which is of great importance as the transport-route of goods from the Pacific Ocean to Yakutsk, is navigable for nearly 400 miles. From the south-west the Lena receives only one large tributary, the Vilui, which is about 1350 miles in length and navigable for about 750 of them.

The course of the Lena is very tortuous, thus making its absolute length so great. In its upper part the current is rapid, as also is the case near the delta; otherwise it runs very slowly. At its source it is about 2855 feet above the level of the sea, at Ust-Kutsk 921 feet, at Kirensk 820, and at Yakutsk only 213 feet. On the upper Lena navigation commences in the first part of May and closes in the middle of October; at the delta the breaking up of the ice takes place at the end of June, and it freezes at the beginning of October or even sooner. The breaking up of the ice on this gigantic body of water is one of nature's most stupendous phenomena, and often causes very great devastation.

After these general remarks on the Lena and its basin, it is time for me to return to our voyage down the majestic river. As we steamed along, the air was heavy with the aromatic odour from the endless forests, below which appeared the rocks of red sandstone, the fantastically-shaped

limestone pinnacles, or the picturesque strata of slate which formed the cliffs, all mirrored in the calm surface of the river, while gigantic blocks of ice, though we were still at the beginning of June and at the same degree of latitude as northern Germany, lay here and there upon the shores. From time to time we stopped at a village, which, with its monotonous row of small grey or smoke-blackened houses on each side of the village-street, produced a melancholy impression, which was still more strengthened by the looks of the inhabitants, who, consisting largely of exiles and their descendants, betrayed both physical and moral misery. As soon as the steamer stopped, a crowd of rag-covered and evil-smelling beggars would congregate at the landing-place, asking for alms in piteous tones.

In places the river widened, enclosing islands, on which small horses and a few equally small cattle were grazing; and often we passed *pauski* and *kayuki*, silently dropping down the river with the current. The navigation of the upper Lena is not without its dangers, owing to the many shallows. During the first 24 hours of our voyage we passed several craft, mostly *pauski*, which had run aground, and our steamer lost much time in trying to help some of them afloat. Finally the barge towed by our own vessel ran aground, and we worked a whole night trying to get it afloat without succeeding. Fortunately, however, another steamer came up, and by her we were able to proceed to Ust-Kutsk. Even to steamers navigation on the upper Lena is risky, because the numerous shal-

lows are not in any way marked out. Instead, two men stand at the bows, one on each side, by turns measuring with long poles the depth of the river, which they call out in a monotonous sing-song drawl.

On the 4th of June we arrived at Ust-Kutsk, picturesquely situated on the western shore of the river, at the mouth of its tributary, the river Kut. This place was originally one of a series of forts established by the Kossacks along the Lena in the 16th century; it derives its importance of to-day from the salt-works, owned by the government, and also from being the terminus of the road from Yeniseisk connecting the Siberian railroad with the upper Lena. The distance from Tulun on the Trans-Siberian railway to Ust-Kutsk is only about 140 miles. Even now large quantities of goods are transported by this road, and a branch line to connect the Lena with the great Siberian railroad from Tulun to Ust-Kutsk is probably only a question of time.

The historical interest of Ust-Kutsk ought not, perhaps, to be altogether passed without notice, for it was one of the first spots on the great river to be occupied by the Russians. And here, perhaps, it would be as well to point out the fact that it was originally the adventurous Russian hunters and trappers who first penetrated eastward as far as the Lena, and later to the Pacific Ocean and America, preparing the way for the Russian dominion, and not the Kossack warriors, who only followed the track of the former and enrolled them as members of their marauding expeditions. Thus it was ten hunters and trappers who,

with a certain Vasili Bugor at their head, came on snow-shoes in the year 1628 from the Yenisei and discovered the great river Lena, on which lived at that time about 150,000 Yakuts. In Ust-Kutsk also lived for many years the celebrated and adventurous beaver-trapper Yevropei Pavlovitch Khabaroff, who with a handful of kindred spirits conquered the immense territory of the Amur region in 1649 and, provided with fire-arms, defeated entire companies of Chinese soldiers. Soon, however, Khabaroff was summoned to Moscow, from whence he returned to Ust-Kutsk, where he had the mortification of learning that the Amur region had been restored to China through the treaty of Nertschinsk. Khabaroff established the salt-works of Ust-Kutsk, and also made the first agricultural experiments in that place.

At Ust-Kutsk our expedition arrived just in time to catch an old and rickety mail-steamer, the *Rabotnik*, a craft with flat bottom and paddle-wheels, and the after-part covered with a wooden superstructure. Like the Lena steamers in general, it had the appearance of a crawfish. The first- and second-class passengers consisted of "gold-Barons" on their way to Vitim, some merchants, and a couple of civil officers. Everything—tickets, food, and drink—was exorbitantly dear. There was, nevertheless, a good deal of drinking, although a bottle of champagne cost from 12 to 15 roubles!

Although there is plenty of coal on the Lena, wood is alone used for the steamers, the larger vessels consuming

15 or 20 fathoms in 24 hours. Most of the steamers not having room for so bulky a fuel are thus compelled to make frequent stoppages. This is the cause of much loss of time, because in most cases the wood has to be cut from the root, chopped, and carried on board. These frequent halts on the way were, however, of considerable interest and use to us, for they gave us excellent opportunities for studying the country and making collections. The captain warned us to be on the look-out for bears, with which the forests were said to be teeming, but we never saw any, although there were plenty of fresh tracks.

In the town of Kirensk, beautifully situated opposite the mouth of the Kirenga, we stopped several hours. This enabled us to get a glimpse of the transport-prison, an old tumble-down, one-storeyed building with broken windows, and the picturesque old cathedral, built at the time of the fort of Kirensk, in 1635.

I had a conversation with one of the chief men of the place, who complained bitterly of the want of popular education, the small number of teachers, and their miserable pay. The sanitary condition of the place, also, was said to be worse than bad, and epidemics had been raging.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE MIDDLE LENA.

Vitim—The Gold Districts—Labour on the Goldfields—"Varnak-Wages"—Statistics of the Gold Output—System of Mining—Pay-day—"The Nobility of Vitim"—Trans-shipment to the *Permiak*—Scenery of the Middle Lena—Exiles northward bound—Yakutised Russians—"Pillars of the Lena"—Olekminsk.

AT the town of Vitim we also stopped for a few hours. This place has considerable commercial importance as the depôt for the gold-fields on the river of the same name. It is now connected with Yakutsk by telegraph, and is the northern terminus of the telegraph-line.

The gold-production of the gold districts of Vitim and Olekma was in former years very large. The wealth of the Sibiriakoff family and others has been created here. Of late years, however, it has been diminishing, for the primitive methods hitherto followed have only worked the richest deposits, and this in a very slovenly manner. It is only latterly that modern machinery has been introduced. Considerable foreign capital, mostly Belgian, has recently been invested in these mines, and negotiations with foreign capitalists were said to be going on to sell a great part

of the gold-fields on the Vitim.[1] About 7500 men are engaged here, of whom nearly half the number are "*varnaki*"—i.e. exiled criminals. Their work is really forced labour, for which they receive very small pay. "Varnak wages" means in Siberia starvation wages.

The "free" labourers receive better pay, it is true, but the greater part of it goes to the stores of the "gold-barons" or to the rum sellers—the truck-system and illegal sale of spirits flourishing here to an extent that is probably unsurpassed elsewhere in the world, not to speak of other means and ways of robbing the working men.

The work in these gold-fields is exceedingly hard; the soil being frozen to unknown depths, the miners have to work wading knee-deep in ice-cold water; and after the long day's work they spend the night in overcrowded barracks, begrimed with dirt and teeming with vermin. Disease, especially scurvy and diarrhœa, is rife, and the mortality enormous.

The diggers commence operations in the spring, going to the taiga, as it is called, and working hard all the summer under the guard of a special police until the 22nd

[1] The statistics of the gold-production of Siberia in general show the following figures. During the period from 1836 to 1847 the annual output increased from 1375 to 22,440 kilograms; in the period from 1847 to 1852 it oscillated between 18,000 and 18,200 kg.; but from 1852 to 1870 it diminished constantly. From 1875 it again increased, but only because of the discovery of gold on the Amur. More than half of the entire amount of gold produced in Siberia now comes from eastern Siberia (i.e. east of the Yenisei). Thus of the total output, 44,060 kg. (or 1,550,912 ozs.), in 1894, 25,000 kg. (or 880,000 ozs.) came from eastern Siberia.

THE OLD CATHEDRAL, KIRENSK.

of September. All this time they receive no money, only food, clothing etc. "on the book" at the storehouse. On this great pay-day they get what is left of their earnings and go to Vitim, which for a couple of weeks is now changed into a veritable pandemonium, until the gold earned or stolen during the summer has all gone to the drinking-saloons, the brothels, or the robbers. It is a common occurrence for gold-diggers to disappear during these days of riot without leaving a trace behind them. And who cares for their loss—"it was only a *varnàk!*"

At Vitim several passengers left the steamer, and some new ones, belonging to "the nobility of Vitim", came on board. A few miles north of the town we passed the mouth of the river Vitim, where we had a beautiful view of the snow-clad mountains towards the south-east. According to the information we received at Ust-Kutsk we were to meet the steamer *Lena* at Vitim and continue our northward voyage in her. But as neither the *Lena* nor another steamer which was expected made their appearance, the old *Rabotnik*, which should have returned at Vitim, had to continue her way further north.

In the middle of the night we met the steamer *Permiak*, coming from Yakutsk, overcrowded with passengers and goods. The two vessels having anchored alongside each other, the trans-shipment began in general crowding and confusion, and continued till late in the morning of the following day. The *Permiak* was an old steamer, very much like the *Rabotnik*.

North of Vitim the villages, originally established by command to serve as posting-stations, became smaller and smaller. Now for the first time we began to hear the Yakut language, which was to sound in our ears for several months, Yakuts now and then increasing the number of the third-class passengers.

The wild beauty and overpowering majesty of the great Lena here reigns supreme. On the rivers and in the forests of the far north of Europe your individuality finds, so to speak, a support in the constant change of scenery; but here it is suppressed by the monotonous, endless wilderness, and the solemn grandeur of the vast river. You steam on day after day, night after night, for hundreds of miles in the same direction, ever further and further away from civilisation, and nearer and nearer to the eternal domain of the polar ice. In this vast wilderness the "Mother Lena" with its ever-growing proportions and mightiness, forms the *pièce de resistance.* In its serene depth all is mirrored. Here a cyclopean wall of immense blocks of sandstone has been reared by primeval forces; there a colossal mass of rock overhangs the water, into which it would fall were it not sustained by a row of strange and gigantic pillars of the same material. Here beneath a huge perpendicular cliff a whirlpool is ever moving in its eternal circle; while yonder are seen cathedrals with innumerable spires and pinnacles, or ruins of fairy castles of greyish and white limestone. Columns of magnificent larch-trees and Siberian pines stand in the ravines and valleys like

an army ready to attack the fortresses which are threatening above their heads, while higher up stand scattered individuals of Siberian pine, as if trying to fight their way alone and unaided towards the fort. Then the scene is changed, and a view slowly opens out of cliffs of beautifully regular layers of slate and green porphyry, producing an impression alike fantastic and unreal. Now and then the mouth of some great cave yawns before you, or hot sulphur-springs are seen welling forth at the foot of the mountain, filling the air with pungent odour. And ever and again the "shore-mountains" are cut through by nameless rivers coming from the unknown depths of the taiga, where the foot of civilised man has never trod.

This mighty nature overpowers you. The voices of men on board sound strange and inharmonious, and you find a place in the bows away from the crowd where you may rest undisturbed, or on the captain's bridge, at the side of the Yakut pilot standing silent and serious at the helm, knowing all the windings and turns of "Mother Lena", its currents, its shallows, and its rocks. And in the twilight of the northern night, when the voices and noise on board have subsided and the strong scent of the forest is unpolluted by smells from the kitchen, you are overpowered by the mighty spirit of nature. As the night-hours advance, the cold increases. The glass has dropped below freezing-point and one shivers, partly from cold, partly perhaps from one's surroundings. Listen! What is that? Deep melancholy tones, as if coming from an unknown

world quiver through the cold night air, echoing faintly from the steep cliffs, which tower up like prison-walls on either side of the river. The steamer rounds the promontory, and yonder in the pale light of the Arctic night appear two craft resembling gigantic coffins, slowly moving forward with the current. The plaintive tones become stronger and stronger, the outlines of the coffins clearer and clearer. On their lids are sitting a crowd of men and women and a few children, and at each end stands an armed gendarme. They are *pauski* laden with exiles on their way to Yakutsk. The captain slows the engines, and while our steamer glides gently past, I open the camera to impress on its plate the image of these melancholy craft.

Among these exiles, as I afterwards learnt, were not only common criminals, but also some followers of Leo Tolstoy, and others of the best and noblest sons and daughters of Russia, on their way to Yakutsk, to Verkhoyansk, and —hundreds of miles beyond – to Kolymsk, to be buried alive in the most dreary land on the surface of our globe.

The distance increased between the steamer and the floating coffins, their outlines became more and more dim, the now but half-caught tones of the plaintive melodies grew weaker, and finally died away behind us into the night.

We have passed the border between the provinces of Irkutsk and Yakutsk. The villages on the western shore have become still smaller, but the river has grown to several kilometres in width, here and there, as before, enclosing

SCENE IN OLEKMINSK.

islands on which the small and shaggy cattle are now and then seen grazing. These cattle belong to the Yakuts, who seldom live near the river, but have their yurtas by the lakes in the interior of the country, or in the forest at some distance from the Lena. The villages are peopled by Russians with a smaller or larger percentage of Yakut blood in their veins. Most of them have forgotten their native tongue and speak only the Yakut language, and have also in other respects become "Yakutised." On a sunny day we passed the "Pillars of the Lena," fantastically-shaped rocks of limestone, forming an unbroken chain of cliff for about five and twenty miles along the eastern shore of the river. A little later we approached the "town" of Olekminsk, situated at the mouth of the river Olekma, and came to anchor.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROVINCE OF YAKUTSK.

Physical Characters of the Province—Intense Cold—Noises of the Arctic Night—The Storms of Spring—Break-up of the Ice—Summer in the Far North—An ever-frozen Soil—Products of the Province—Mammoth Ivory.

BEFORE proceeding further north we may pause for a moment for a glance at the province of Yakutsk and its inhabitants.

According to the calculation of General Strelbitsky, the area of the province of Yakutsk comprises in round figures 3,900,000 square kilometres, i.e. as much as the whole of European Russia with the exception of Poland and Finland. Orographically it may be naturally divided into two parts—namely, the lowland west of the Lena, through which only a few less important mountain ridges run, and the immense region to the east of that river, traversed by the great chain of the Jablonoff mountains, which in some places to the south-east reach a height of nearly 7000 feet, giving to this part of the province the character of a mountainous region. Shut off by mountain-chains from the warmer currents of air coming from the south and the south-east, and exposed to the Arctic winds from the north, this immense

country has the severest climate in the world, with an extreme temperature varying between + 103° and — 93° Fahrenheit. The winter commences early. The smaller rivers and the numberless lakes—of which there are said to be 100,000—begin to freeze in September. In the first or second week of October the whole country is covered with snow. The cold increases day by day. The mean temperature of October and November varies between + 5° and — 22° Fahr.; in the months of December, January and February between — 13° and — 40° Fahr.; and in March and April between + 14° and — 22° Fahr. In the middle of the winter the temperature may remain for weeks together below the freezing-point of mercury, and at times will sink to 80° below zero Fahr. Such a low temperature gives a keen and penetrating sharpness to the air, and all life seems to have congealed. The Yakut winter does not rage and roar, as does that of northern Europe, but suppresses all motion. Neither the sun, which only for a few hours appears above the horizon, nor the earth, which is frozen to an unknown depth and in the summer melts only two or three feet, can withstand its power. The constantly growing cold compresses the air more and more, until it finally threatens, as it were, to suffocate all life beneath its weight. The strongest currents of air from the Arctic sea, from the Pacific, or from the immense continental regions lying to the south are unable to move this inert and compressed mass of air. The heaviest storms powerlessly rebound from it and, so to speak, become bound at its feet,

being cooled down and assimilated in their turn into the colossal frost-mass, which is sufficient to cool all Siberia during the whole year. This incubus, as with justice it may be termed, lies immovable over the whole country for weeks and months, and if the dry and compressed air did not itself somewhat hinder the radiation of heat, all life would perish beneath the colossus.

All moisture is pressed out of the atmosphere by this terrible cold, becomes crystallized, and fills the air as a thin, frosty fog, making the moon appear as if surrounded by a silvery ring. And when a faint milky or silvery phosphorescence shines from the polar ice, and the many-coloured flames of the aurora borealis suddenly appear, then the frost is reaching its climax. Perhaps from an instinctive knowledge of the approach of still greater cold, or more probably frightened at the sight of this phenomenon, the Yakut sledge-dogs unite in raising a protracted and hideous howl, which ceases only when the last flames of the northern lights have disappeared. Then every living sound ceases and silence as of the grave prevails, the Yakuts shovel more snow about their huts, and even the smoke has hard work to go up through the chimney and rises only a few feet above the roof.

But the stillness is only apparent. The snow does not creak, it grates and squeaks under foot, and rings like metal; the breath congeals and falls to the ground in the shape of fine ice-crystals. The deep silence of the night is broken only by weird and hideous sounds resembling

long-drawn-out moanings and howlings, with now and again a sudden thunder as of a cannonade, from the bursting ice and the rending of the frozen earth.

In the lakes which do not freeze to the bottom, the ice attains a thickness of 10 feet; in the rivers still more. The ice becomes as hard as stone, its splinters cut the hands like a knife, and if a hard-tempered axe is directed against the stem of a tree its edge breaks into fragments.

The terror of the Yakut winter is increased by its darkness, especially in the northern regions, where the winter night continues for weeks and months. Only in the month of March do "the horns of the bull of winter begin to break," as the Yakuts say in their picturesque language. The sun rises higher and higher every day, its rays in the clear air begin to melt the snow on the roofs of houses, while in the shadow the temperature still marks twenty degrees below zero.

In March and April terrible storms prevail. The transition between winter and summer is so sudden that one can hardly speak of spring and autumn. In a couple of weeks the winter is transformed into summer. The snow melts with incredible rapidity, and the water, flowing into valleys, lakes, and rivers, lifts the thick ice, which has been riven into small fragments by the winter cold. In the lakes the ice melts slowly, and the storms which drive it against the shore only crush it little by little. In the rivers, on the other hand, the ice is violently broken up and carried towards the sea by the powerful spring-floods. At first

the water is unable to carry with it the huge ice-floes, which in narrow places are heaped up in colossal masses, damming up the river until the barrier is broken, when, carried along with resistless force, it destroys everything in its way, sweeping away earth, rocks, and entire groves of trees, which are mown down like grass. As we descended the Lena in the middle of June gigantic blocks of ice were still lying on the shores of the river, some twenty feet or more above its water-line.

The summer in Yakutsk is short, only four months in the south and two months in the north; but it is bright and usually warm, indeed in some places the mercury even touches 103° Fahr. on occasion. The ever-frozen soil, which in the neighbourhood of the city of Yakutsk melts to a depth of 3 to 4 feet, and in the northern regions to barely a foot at times, becomes so heated that you can hardly walk barefooted on the sand. The first half of the summer is usually dry, and the plants then receive moisture exclusively from the melting soil. If the soil in the autumn has been sufficiently saturated by rain, there will be no lack of this; if not, the crops will fail from drought. During the latter part of the summer the quantity of rain is usually so large that it is difficult to prevent the crops from rotting. Great variations occur also in temperature in summer, thus a northerly storm may in a few hours lower the thermometer from 85° to freezing-point, and snow may fall in July at a distance of fifteen hundred miles south of the Arctic Ocean.

The perennially frozen soil begins in the southern parts

THE OLD KOSSACK FORT, YAKUTSK.

of Yakutsk. In the neighbourhood of the city of Yakutsk, according to the calculations of the savants, the earth is frozen to a depth of 1000 feet! This ever-frozen soil exerts a great influence on the configuration of the lakes and rivers. It prevents the absorption of the water by the earth. There are no springs and no subterranean waters. This accounts also for the very great number of lakes and marshes in northern Siberia. For the same reason the rivers very rapidly swell above their normal limits, causing at times most disastrous inundations.

As a rule, the lakes and rivers abound with fish, while in the forests are to be found elk, reindeer, fox, sable, etc., and in the north a species of bighorn or mountain sheep. In spring the country teems with birds of passage.

The greater part of the province of Yakutsk is covered by virgin forest, mainly consisting of the Siberian larch and the Siberian spruce. Among the larches the birch is always to be found; in the southern parts the Norwegian spruce and pine, the aspen, and the "cedar" occur. The shores of the rivers are fringed with different species of willow and the Siberian alder. Natural meadows are found only in river-valleys and on the bottoms of dried-up lakes. On these natural meadows the Yakuts pasture their herds of cattle, and in their neighbourhood they erect their yurtas.

The greater part of the immense region of Yakutsk is still a "*terra incerta et incognita*". Thousands upon thousands of square miles where the wild animals and the Tunguses roam have as yet never been trodden by the feet of

civilised man. To judge from the comparatively limited regions more or less explored, it is probable that great natural resources are to be found in the forests and in the mountains by the explorers of the future. Besides the gold-fields on the rivers Vitim and Olekma, which have been worked since 1840, both gold and silver have been found on the river Aldan and elsewhere. Rich iron ore has been discovered in several places, and in the middle and northern parts of Yakutsk there is plenty of coal. The Lena and some of its tributaries yield precious stones of various kinds, and the existence of malachite and graphite has also been ascertained in more than one spot.

I have already spoken of the abundance of fish. The quantity of fur obtained, on the other hand, has grown smaller and smaller, the valuable sable having diminished greatly or entirely disappeared over wide regions, probably not only on account of the war of extermination carried on against it, but also because of the great forest fires, which annually lay waste hundreds of square miles. One of the natural resources of Yakutsk, which has been worked for ages, belongs to the extinct animal kingdom—namely, the valuable mammoth tusks. Middendorff calculated in the forties that, during the period of two hundred years previous to that time, the tusks of at least twenty thousand mammoths had been obtained in northern Siberia. At the present day, within the province of Yakutsk alone, about 17 tons of mammoth tusks are annually collected.

This does not, however, represent the total of the finds,

for numbers of them being decayed or cracked are left behind as valueless. It is only for a short time in the first part of the summer, when the spring floods have washed out the frozen earth in which the remains of this animal are buried, that the mammoth tusks can be gathered. Then the natives roam about far and wide searching the river-valleys and ravines where the floods have left fresh surfaces exposed, and gather in their crop. In consequence of the perennially frozen condition of the soil the floods wash out the earth more in a horizontal than a perpendicular direction, and from this cause these annual wash-outs often extend over a large area. The mammoth crop, then, may in a certain sense be said to depend on the amount of rain and the weather in general during the spring. On the New Siberian Islands, on the other hand, it is the ice and the sea which make the tusks accessible to the collectors, by undermining and eroding the beach or cliffs; while sometimes, especially after heavy weather, they are thrown up on shore by the waves. The natives in the service of the merchants usually start over the frozen sea with their dogs and sledges for the islands in March, staying there all the summer and returning with their sledges loaded with ivory in the autumn, when the sea is again frozen. The mammoth crop on the islands is very greatly dependent on the winds. If, for example, protracted westerly weather prevails, the water rises very high, while during easterly storms it sinks, making a larger surface of cliff and beach accessible to the collector.

CHAPTER IX.

THE YAKUTS.

Population—Social Organisation—Yakut Horses and Cattle—Culture of Cereals—The Yurta—Dress and Ceremonies—Shamanism—Russian Shamanists.

THE entire population of Yakutsk amounted in January 1897, according to official reports, to 277,835, of whom 6 per cent were Russians, the remainder belonging to different native races. Of these natives no less than 93 per cent, or 244,183, are Yakuts; 10,269 are Tunguses, and the rest belong to various smaller tribes, such as the Dolgans, Lamuts, Yukagirs, etc.

The Yakuts live in groups, scattered here and there in the forests or on the tundras, each family living in a yurta, or, if on the tundra, in tents. If they were evenly distributed over the whole country, each family or yurta would dispose of an area of nearly twenty-eight square miles. But the Yakuts, as we have mentioned above, prefer settling in groups, where there is plenty of pasture, or in the neighbourhood of lakes and rivers abounding with fish, or in forests where game is to be had. Such groups or communities are called *aga-usa* ("paternal-families"

or relations). The members of these communities of relatives do not marry within the community, but they keep together to help and protect each other. They elect an "elder" and form a council, which decides their common affairs, settles disputes, etc. These communities in their turn associate themselves into larger groups, forming the so-called *naslegi* (association of family communities), which again are organised into *ulus*, corresponding to the Russian village-districts *(volost)*. At the head of the *ulus* stands the *golovà* or chief, with an *upràva* or kind of police-court. The *naslegi* are administered by a district-council and a district-elder having the title of *kujas* (prince), which was conferred on these tribal chiefs by Catherine II. The taxes are collected by the local authorities of the *ulus*, which are by law connected with the officials of the imperial treasury and the police authorities. The taxes *(Yassak)* were formerly paid in the shape of furs, but the sable having to a great extent been exterminated, they are now paid in money, the amount of which, plus communal taxes, varies between 12 and 50 shillings per tributary "soul", depending on the decision of the local authorities and the economical condition of the tax-payer.

The Yakuts are generally poor. Their principal possessions consist of cattle and horses. The Yakut horses are small and shaggy, but very hardy, strong, and good-tempered animals. Throughout the long and terrible winter they subsist on the grass underneath the snow, which, like the reindeer, they remove with their feet, the strongest

horses going in front, and the weaker ones following them, eating the uncovered grass. The Yakuts, like other Tatar peoples, are very fond of horse-meat, and from the horses' milk they prepare the well-known *kumiss*. The number of horses they own, however, is diminishing, and only well-to-do Yakuts as a rule now keep them, the great majority having cattle instead.[1] The Yakut cattle are very small and of inferior quality. The cows give very little milk; a family of ordinary size needs for its subsistence from 10 to 15 head of cattle, of which 7 to 9 are milch cows. The great majority of Yakut families, however, have not so many, and want and famine are very common among them. As a rule they are deeply in debt to a few wealthy individuals, mostly of their own people, who keep them in a state of slavery, and being thus compelled to work most of their time for them, they are unable during the short summer to provide for their own wants. Their principal work consists in gathering hay on the meadows and marshes.

The usual food of the great majority of Yakuts is the so-called "*tar*," which is a mixture of meat, fish, various roots, grass, and pine-bark. This is put into skimmed milk mixed with water, to which is added a little flour, if such is to be had, and the whole is boiled into a kind of

[1] In former times the Yakuts regarded cattle as unclean animals, but little by little utility has conquered superstition, so that the cow has now to a great extent replaced the horse both as a yielder of milk and meat, and also as a beast of burden.

porridge. The Yakuts drink a great deal of tea, and are very fond of strong spirits. The wealthy eat meat every day and a kind of thick pancake, made of water and barley-flour.

The culture of cereals has only of late years been introduced among the Yakuts by the Russians, especially the

YAKUTS ON THE LENA.

"*Skoptsi*" and other sectarians. Instead of flour they formerly used the juicy part of the bark of the pine and different kinds of roots. Half a century ago no one believed it would be possible to cultivate cereals in Yakutsk. In the first experiments the crops were frost-bitten, but by-and-by the corn became acclimatised, and now in favor-

able years good crops are secured. In the short space of two months from sowing, thanks to the usually hot summers, the grain ripens and is harvested. In the neighbourhood of the city of Yakutsk are thus grown barley, oats, wheat, potatoes and even *water-melons!* The implements and methods of agriculture are of course very primitive, wooden ploughs and harrows being exclusively used.

The Yakut dwellings, the "yurtas," are wooden huts with sloping walls covered with a thick layer of turf. In the place of window-glass ox-bladders are used in summer-time and ice in winter. The window-openings are usually not more than a foot square in size. The fireplace is in the middle of the yurta, and is made of poles, placed close together and covered with mud or clay. Along the walls inside the dwelling run low *nares* or benches, between the wooden pillars, serving as sitting-places during the daytime and as bedsteads at night. The yurta is divided into two parts: to the right from the entrance is the women's and children's apartment, where, among the poorest classes, the cattle are also housed; and to the left that of the men. To the women's apartment men not belonging to the family are not allowed to go. The Yakuts generally have special yurtas for winter and summer, the latter usually situated near their meadows and haystacks. In the far north they often live in tents or huts resembling those of the Lapps.

The summer dress of the Yakuts consists of the *robaschka* (the Russian "over-shirt"), and the *balachòn*, a kind of blouse, both of cloth, long boots of soft leather, and

wide breeches of the same material. The dress of the women differs from that of the men only by its greater length and its ornaments. In the winter they dress in fur, more or less costly according to their circumstances. The warm skin of the polar hare is very much in use as lining. The fur-coat, which is made like a shirt and put on over the head, has usually a hood of the same material attached to it. All the Yakuts are inveterate smokers, and always wear the tobacco-pouch with pipe and flint and steel, together with the indispensable long knife, attached to the belt about their waist. They are fairly clever handicraftsmen as carpenters and above all as smiths, a craft which has old and high traditions, and is inherited. At the time of their subjugation by the Russians 300 years ago they knew how to produce iron from the ore, and their traditions show that the metal has been known to them from time immemorial. They are also clever carvers of wood and bone. Generally speaking, they are a gifted people, and some of their number have gone through the university and become learned men. But their thirst for knowledge cannot be satisfied in the few official schools, where the teaching is given in Russian. After three or four years' study in these schools they know only a smattering of the language, which they soon forget.

The Yakuts marry early and, as a rule, have many children, few of whom, however, survive the age of early childhood. Marriage among them is a matter of business, though behind the cold formalities of the transaction there

may sometimes lurk warmer human feelings. To the father of the bride is paid a certain price *(kalym)*, varying in amount according to circumstances. The *kalym* is considered as payment for the rearing and education of

YAKUTS AND YURTA.[1]

the girl. The purchase is done by the father of the bridegroom or his representative. The terms of payment as well as the marriage ceremonies in general vary; the

[1] The Yakut Androssoff who saved the lives of the two survivors of the *Jeannette* Expedition, with his wife. (See p. 152.)

customs of the northern Yakuts differing from those of the people in the southern parts of the province. The wedding, which is attended by many guests, both invited and uninvited, takes place both in the home of the bride and that of the bridegroom; the relatives and friends of the bride congregating at her home, and those of the bridegroom at his. The bride and bridegroom do not sit at the table, but in a corner behind the door, with their faces turned towards the wall, the bride on the women's side, and the bridegroom on the men's side of the yurta. Both are dressed in their best clothes. Thus they sit for three days, i.e., as long as the festival continues, without looking at one another. The young people, both girls and boys, are all the time singing, dancing, and playing. Prominent guests and old men sit on the *nares* along the wall, smoking and drinking tea, kumiss, and vodka. Food is eaten every now and then all the time, but the principal festival-meals are the dinner and supper. In front of each guest, on a horse-hide which serves as table-cloth, is placed a large piece of boiled meat with the bones attached. The relatives of the young couple exchange these pieces of meat, and this performance is the principal part of the Yakut marriage ceremony, symbolising the union between the families, which henceforth are to forget all enmity, and for the future be "flesh of one flesh and bone of one bone." Formerly, when the custom of "robbing the bride" still continued, this ceremony consisted in the exchange of gifts as a token of reconciliation and as compensation

for losses sustained during mutual feuds. When the wedding is over and the guests are ready to leave, the following ceremony takes place. Holding a goblet of kumiss in their hands, the guests are conducted by the host and hostess three times around the *konovjasi*—poles standing outside the yurta, to which horses are tied, and which are considered sacred. Then the guests mount their horses, drink part of the kumiss, and pour the rest on the manes of their steeds.

At the present day the Yakuts are often married in churches according to the orthodox ritual, and they also bury their dead in the Russian manner. For the last hundred years they have been nominally members of the orthodox Church, and very often make the sign of the Cross, but in their inmost hearts they have stronger faith in the power of the Shaman over the evil spirits than in the dogmas of the Church, of which they know but little. Indeed, not only the Yakuts, but even the Russians themselves—the officials, too, among the number—apply to the Shaman to heal their diseases, drive away evil spirits, and predict coming events.

CHAPTER X.

THE SKOPTSI IN EXILE.

Olekminsk—Spaskoie—What Skoptsi Labour has done—An uneasy Corpse—Marscha, the Skoptsi Colony—A Finnish Member of the Sect—A Philosopher's Library—History of the Skoptsi.

THE first place of any importance at which we stopped after having crossed the border of the province of Yakutsk, was the town of Olekminsk, the depôt of the gold-fields on the river Olekma. The town proper, with its small grey houses and its filthy street, deserved no higher rank than that of village. In the neighbourhood of the town, however, and connected with it by a broad street, lies Spaskoie, the village of the "Skoptsi", which, with its substantial and well-built houses, its cleanliness and good order, forms a most remarkable contrast with the town.

In Olekminsk, as in Kirensk, various epidemics had been raging, and had carried off many of its inhabitants. In the colony of the Skoptsi, on the other hand, there had been no epidemic of any kind, thanks to the cleanliness and rational way of living of its inhabitants.

In this place, as elsewhere, the Skoptsi have done wonders as agriculturists. When they came here forty

years ago the virgin forest covered the marshy country right up to the river bank. Now, cultivated fields extend far away beyond the village. One of these remarkable people, pointing to them, remarked: "Yes, God has verily blessed our work." He complained, however, of being compelled to live so far away from his native land, for which he was longing. The Skoptsi, I found, were making bread and other things, which they sold, not only to the town, but also to the gold-fields. The townspeople blamed them for enriching themselves at their cost, totally oblivious of the fact that bread has become four or five times cheaper since they began to cultivate the soil. I was told by a reliable person that these sectarians were not only slandered, but even attacked and robbed by their neighbours, and were compelled to keep watch-dogs and fire-arms for self-defence, although this was contrary to their religious principles. I asked one of their adversaries why they did not raise their own crops and make bread themselves, instead of enriching the Skoptsi.

"What! *We* dig in the dirt! No, Sir; our business is with the gold-fields."

This "business" from what I learnt, is very much of the same nature as that carried on at Vitim. When the gold-diggers arrive at Olekminsk, they squander their earnings in a few days, and some of them disappear without leaving a trace behind them. In the spring, when the snow melts, corpses of "unknown persons" are found here and there on the shores of the Lena or in the forests.

These corpses are kept in a store-house belonging to the local hospital, sometimes lying there for weeks before legal investigations can be made, the hospital being only occasionally visited by the physician. On one occasion, I was told, the following incident took place. A corpse had been found, and was sent by the chief of the police to the store-house of the hospital. The physician, however, refused to receive it and sent it back again, but the chief of the police again returned it, and so it went its grisly journey to and fro, until a compromise was effected and it found a resting-place at length among the hospital provisions!

At the time of our visit to Olekminsk the temperature had risen to 66° Fahr. and, looking out over the green fields, I found it hard to realise the fact that I was walking on soil frozen to the depth of several hundreds of feet.

Having received its great tributary, the Olekma, the Lena increases to the width of about two miles, and widens more and more, until, at the city of Yakutsk, the distance between the hills which form its valley is not much under twenty miles.

On our arrival at the city of Yakutsk the Governor kindly conducted me to Marscha, a colony of the Skoptsi, situated some four miles outside the city. We drove through cultivated fields, granted by the government to the Kossacks, but to a great extent rented and cultivated by the Skoptsi. The meadows were bright with brilliant spring-flowers, and the even and fresh green carpet of the sown fields promised good crops. After half-an-hour's drive

some windmills were seen between groves of birch-trees, and soon rows of well-built wooden *izbas* or farm-houses came in sight, and crossing a bridge over a beautiful brook we came into one of the main streets of the village. Neatly-clad men and women in holiday dress—it was a Sunday—stood in groups by the roadside, saluting reverentially the Governor and the strangers. Our carriage turned through an open gate into a yard in front of the house of the *starosta* or village elder, a tall and strongly-built man, who, surrounded by a number of his co-religionists, received us with uncovered head and conducted us to a large verandah. The floor was covered with carpets, and on a large table stood a boiling samovar, surrounded by all sorts of eatables, from delicious butter, eggs, and sardines to different kinds of marmalades and biscuits. Before sitting down to luncheon, we looked at the rooms. On all the floors were carpets, on the walls hung portraits of the imperial family and of different distinguished persons, but no pictures of saints were to be seen.

While at table, the Governor told me that there was a Swedish-speaking Finn among the exiled Skoptsi, and asked me if I would like to meet him. To this of course I gladly assented, and in a few minutes a venerable-looking old man came in and made a deep bow, whereupon he was introduced by the Governor. His name, I learnt, was Aug. Lindström. Born in Åbo in Finland, 72 years before, he had spent no less than forty years in exile in Yakutsk, yet he spoke Swedish still with perfect fluency. He had

HOUSE OF SKOPTSI, MARSCHA.

been a dyer by trade, and as a young man was working in St. Petersburg, when he became seriously concerned about the salvation of his soul. About this time he came in contact with some Skoptsi, who persuaded him to self-mutilation and the acceptance of their creed. He then resolved to go through "the baptism of fire" in order to become fit for the kingdom of heaven. The ceremony, which cost him three weeks of serious illness, resulted shortly afterwards in exile to Siberia for life. But he was happy to suffer all "for the sake of truth and the kingdom of heaven."

Mr. Lindström was a genuine type of an old quiet pietist. He spoke with the greatest affection and reverence of his old Swedish bible, which he read every day, and which gave him consolation in his trials. A big tear glistened in his eye when I spoke to him about "the land of the thousand lakes" (Finland), which he never more should see. "But," said he, "I shall soon go to a better land, where all trials and sorrows shall have an end."

After luncheon we were shown the barns, store-houses, threshing-machines, mills etc., built by these strange people. We visited a number of homes in the village, and found everywhere the most scrupulous cleanliness and good order. In one izba, to my great surprise, I came upon a large collection of books, containing, besides poetical works by Puschkin, Lermontoff, Niekrassoff and others, some rare volumes, and also various Russian translations of the works of Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and other English writers.

The sectarian owning this library had recently died, and he was spoken of as "a philosopher."

Comparing the homes of these people with those of the ordinary Russian settlers, the contrast, with regard to cleanliness and good order, was so great that we could hardly believe that the inhabitants belonged to the same nationality. A great many of the Skoptsi of Marscha, it is true, had come from the Baltic provinces; and their brethren of Russian extraction did not observe such scrupulous neatness as did they, but the contrast between the former and the orthodox population was, as I have said, astonishing.

As early as the beginning of the 19th century the Russian Government began to exile Skoptsi to Siberia. In the year 1838 the sending of this class of exiles to Yakutsk commenced, and at the beginning of 1860 it was resolved to send them exclusively to the province of Yakutsk. In those days they were often exiled to places unfit for agriculture, and many of them succumbed to famine and the hard climate.

In 1861 an ukase was issued that those of Protestant extraction should be sent to the above-mentioned colony of Marscha, and their brethren of the orthodox Russian connection to Olekminsk and the upper Aldan, in order to establish stations and serve as drivers on the so-called Ayansky line of communication between the sea of Okhotsk and the river Aldan.

In 1866 the Skoptsi in Yakutsk numbered 476; in 1894

they had increased to 1329, and at the present day there are probably not less than about 1600. As there is of course no natural increase of population among these sectarians, it is evident from the above figures that the number of them annually sent into exile is considerable.

The members of this sect are total abstainers, and by that fact alone have risen far above the level of the Russian mujik, slave as he is to vodka. By their care and patience and thriftiness they soon succeed in producing good crops on their land, and have acquired considerable property, especially in the colony of Marscha, which, in fact, feeds the whole city of Yakutsk, and has on two occasions saved it from famine. Before they introduced agriculture, the price of flour in Yakutsk was five to seven roubles a pood of 36lb., now it costs at the most one rouble. Together with other sectarians they have, in more senses than one, been promoters of culture in Yakutsk as well as in Siberia at large, having taught the Yakuts agriculture and otherwise exerted a civilising influence on them by their example. The Skoptsi number at present about 7 per cent. of the Russian population in Yakutsk and about $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the entire population, but more than 15 per cent. of all the cultivated land in the province belongs to them.

Like so many other Russian sects, that of the Skoptsi derives its origin, at least in its present shape, from the great separatist movement in the Russian Church which followed upon the revision of the liturgy by the patriarch Nikon in the 16th century. Within the separatist party

known under the name of the *Staroviéri* or "Old Believers", are comprised among others the sect of the *Khlists*, and among these the Skoptsi first arose and formed themselves into a separate sect. But it is still, in my opinion, an open question whether the peculiar tenets of these people do not extend their roots back to ancient oriental sects—a question which only future researches will decide.

Under the pressure of barbarous persecution the sect of the Skoptsi assumed the character of one of the many secret societies in Russia, and at times it has counted several adherents among the wealthier classes. At the present day their extreme views have been considerably modified, and as a body they stand morally and intellectually far above the average of the Russian common people.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CITY OF YAKUTSK.

Andrée Stories—Yakutsk and its Mud—The Freebooters—Atrocities of the Voyevodes—Revolt of the Natives—Yakutsk of To-day—The Kossack "*payek*".

In the city of Yakutsk we spent over a week, waiting for the steamer *Lena*, in which we were to go down the river from which she takes her name. Besides the governor and other officials, I here interviewed several persons who were said to have more or less knowledge of the Arctic regions, but it was impossible to ascertain whether trappers had or had not visited the New Siberian Islands during the summer of 1897 or the spring of 1898, nor could I get any reliable information calling for alteration of our original plans. Andrée stories of the usual kind, of course, were showered upon us even here. Thus a certain merchant of Yakutsk had seen a luminous balloon sailing southwards one night in November, 1897; a number of Yakuts in the fall of the same year, while travelling on the Upper Aldan, had observed among the mountains "an immense balloon, and in the balloon were three white men;" while a certain person visited us almost every day with a wonderful story to the effect that Yakuts had found Andrée and his companions dead in the forest, and that he would conduct

me to the place, if I would only pay him a certain sum of money down. His story, it is perhaps unnecessary to say, varied every time. From reliable persons who had lived for some time near the mouth of the Yana, I learnt that the depôts which had been left on the New Siberian Islands by Baron von Toll for Nansen, and which Andrée also had received permission to use in case of need, were not in a satisfactory condition. Trappers had visited the islands and had reported that bears had broken open the cases and consumed the contents. There were also other reports, but all agreed in one point—namely, that little or no provisions of any sort were likely to be obtainable at these depôts.

The city of Yakutsk is situated on the western bank of the Lena. It is built on a flat, alluvial, ever-frozen soil, forming a foundation as strong as any rock, which in summer-time melts only to a depth of three or four feet. Only a few houses of brick, however, are built on this eternal ice. The "Mother of Yakutsk"—the weather-beaten wooden fortress erected by the Kossacks in the year 1636—still remains. The town, which in 1897, according to official reports, numbered 5825 inhabitants, consists—besides the churches, the prison and a number of other official buildings—mainly of small dilapidated houses, yurtas and (in the outskirts of the town) earth-huts. In the broad streets the melted soil shakes beneath one's feet, here and there the thin dry crust which covers it breaks through under the pressure of the cart-wheels, and the horses sink knee-deep into the half-frozen sludge. There are no pave-

JUNE ICE ON THE LENA.

ments, a few boards only being laid down in some of the better streets. Nor is there anything in the shape of drains or sewers; the refuse being thrown out on the streets and filling the air with an unexampled series of stenches, to which the epidemics which prevail are doubtless in great measure due. Apart from a large number of officials, the police and the merchants, the population consists mainly of exiles from all parts of Russia and Siberia, and of Yakuts.

As I have already said, it was the adventurous hunters and trappers of the early days who first opened the way for the Russian dominion eastward through Siberia, the Kossacks following in their track, and enrolling them as guides and fellow-brigands. Part of these adventurers coming from Tobolsk through Turukansk on the lower Yenisei, followed the course of the Lower Tunguskaya to its head-waters, whence they crossed the water-divide to the upper Vilui, went down this river, and from its confluence with the Lena ascended the last-named river to the place where the town of Yakutsk now stands. Another party of the invaders, coming from the town of Yeniseisk, followed the course of the tributaries of the Yenisei, the Ilim and Yerma, eastward, crossed the divide, and descended the Lena *viâ* the Kut and other streams to Yakutsk. It was one of the chiefs of these freebooters, Beketoff by name, who erected the fort of Yakutsk in 1636. These different bands of adventurers having robbed and massacred the natives, quarrelled amongst themselves over the rich booty they had secured, until the robbers of Tobolsk

conquered the brigands of Yeniseisk and sent their leader as a prisoner to the authorities.

The historical records of those times, scanty though they are, serve, in addition to the traditions of the natives, to show the manner in which the latter were subjugated to Russian rule. Having by finesse or by firearms made themselves lords and masters, and robbed the natives of their furs and skins, these scoundrels compelled them to contribute annually, under the name of *Yassak* or taxes, a large quantity of sable and other valuable furs, and in consequence they were soon reduced to extreme want and famine. A large number of them fled to the most distant parts of the country to the north and north-east, but the invaders followed them even down to the Arctic sea and to the border of the land of the Tschuktchis, compelling them to pay the *Yassak*. These adventurers met with very little resistance; only the then numerous Yukagirs and Lamuts fought bravely for their liberty, and, later, the courageous Tschuktchi, who up to this day, though nominally under Russian rule, have in reality preserved their independence. A merchant of Yakutsk in those early times has left a description in a manuscript, which has been preserved, of the way in which the natives were treated. He says: "The *Vojevodes* or Military Governors began their rule by imposing the most intolerable burdens in the way of taxes, which went not only to the government, but also to appease the insatiable covetousness of the tax-gatherers. They oppressed, tormented, and tortured

the subjugated natives, under pretext of their taxes being in arrear, but the amount of these taxes was never fixed". Driven to despair by these constant extortions, the natives revolted, but these risings were quenched in blood, thanks to the firearms of their oppressors. A whole series of the most barbarous punishments were then inflicted on the rebels. By order of the vojevode Golovin, the ears and noses of the rebellious Yakuts were cut off and their eyes put out; they were suspended by iron hooks fastened in their backs and between their ribs, and some of them were buried alive. Within the old fort there was a special torture-chamber, where the torture-master worked from early in the morning till late at night. A short respite was afforded the natives when quarrels arose between the vojevodes Gleboff and Golovin over the spoil. Golovin, who was dismissed and punished with the knout, was succeeded by a number of vojevodes who remained only a short time at their post. But the extortions from the natives did not diminish, and their sufferings became intolerable when Andrei Afanasevitch Baryschnieff was appointed to the office of vojevode in Yakutsk in the year 1675. It was during his rule that political offenders and sectarians began to be exiled to the province of Yakutsk, the former usually arriving there with their tongues cut out. "When Baryschnieff entered on his office," says the above-quoted Moskvin in his narrative, "a *régime* of veritable terrorism began. Almost every day sectarians and natives were executed in Yakutsk in the most barbarous manner." The smallest offences were

punished in the most horrible way. The culprits were cut in pieces, burnt alive, boiled alive in kettles, etc.

This fiend of a vojevode was replaced by a certain Priktonsky, under whose rule the Yakuts made, in 1682, their last effort to throw off the foreign yoke. Many sectarians and some Kossacks joined the rebels. The revolt was suppressed and followed by the usual monstrous cruelties. One of the leaders of the revolt, Dschennik, for example, who had been wounded and brought to Yakutsk, was skinned alive! Those who were left of the beaten Yakuts fled to the Vilui, Yana, and Kolyma.

The reform-movement which passed over European Russia in the beginning of the 18th century did not at all touch the far-off Yakuts. Only larger and denser did the throngs of exiles sent to Yakutsk become, and they increased still more during the troublous times immediately after the death of Peter I., many of the noblest and greatest sons of Russia being expatriated to the distant tundras of Yakutsk to be buried alive near the Arctic sea. The vojevodes still continued to rule as tsars in Yakutsk, official "Revisors," who were sent there to investigate into their rule, were imprisoned, knouted, and sent back to Irkutsk.

During the 19th century, with its unsuccessful efforts in the direction of political and religious reform, the stream of political and sectarian exiles to Yakutsk, together with that of common criminals, constantly grew in volume. The barbarous rule of the past has, it is true, been modified during the last few decades, but yet as late as 1889 such

HALF-BREED YAKUTS AND YURTA NEAR YAKUTSK.

atrocious deeds occurred as the horrible massacre of the political exiles in the city of Yakutsk.

Under the rule of the present governor some efforts have been made officially to direct the attention of the government to the evil effects on the province of the exile system. Since the opening of part of the Trans-Siberian railway the number of exiles to Yakutsk as well as to other distant parts of Siberia has, however, still increased, because of the necessity of sending them away from the regions near the railway. The Duchobortsi, i.e., the Quakers of Russia, and the followers of Count Tolstoy, are being exiled north-east of Yakutsk to the forest regions on the Aldan river, where they suffer fearfully from privations and the severity of the climate.

In spite of the numerous police and the soldiery, the security to life and property in Yakutsk is small, and the common level of morality is, to say the least of it, not very high. The corruption, moreover, is spreading from the town far and wide among the natives. The merchants leaving Yakutsk in the fall for the distant parts of the north—the mouth of the Lena, Verkhoyansk, Kolymsk, etc.—to exchange their goods for the valuable furs of the natives, buy the healthiest and best-looking girls from the natives for an even smaller sum than the cost of a reindeer, and take with them a small harem on their long journeys. In the city of Yakutsk these girls are left to their fate and finally perish, or return to their people, spreading physical and moral contamination among them.

The following curious custom among the Kossacks is an illustration of the moral conceptions of the Russian colonists of Yakutsk. Among the privileges granted to the Kossacks is the so-called "*payek*" or "share," which is given to each male Kossack. For each Kossack boy who is born a "*pol-paika*" or "half-share" (1 pood of rye-meal per month) is granted, and from his seventh year a full "share," or double this quantity, is given to him as long as he lives. Each boy born, therefore, is a considerable addition to the wealth of the Kossack's family. The increase of humanity has therefore become a species of game of chance among the Kossacks of Yakutsk, the issue being watched with the greatest suspense. Will a "*payek*" or "share" (a boy) be born or "only a girl?" But not content with this the Kossacks also try to influence the issue of the affair. If the wife has no children, or only girls, she is given over by contract for some time to a father of "shares." If then a boy is born to her, the paternal substitute receives "a half-share" for one year as a remuneration for his services. The unmarried girls are also encouraged to produce "shares," because, according to law, even illegitimately born male children receive the allowance. The reputation of the girl-mothers does not suffer in the least by these proceedings; on the contrary, girls having borne "shares" are in great demand in the matrimonial market of Yakutsk. [1]

[1] *Vide* Dioneo; *Na Krainem Sjevero Vostokje.*

CHAPTER XII.

THE POLITICAL EXILES AND THEIR SERVICES TO SCIENCE.

The Early Explorers—Martyrs of Science—The Meteorology of Verkhoyansk —A *Via Dolorosa*—The Life-Work of Tschekanovsky—His Suicide.

WHILE speaking of the town of Yakutsk, we must not omit a word in recognition of the services of those men who, starting thence on their adventurous journeys to the unknown regions in the far north and east, have, perhaps unwittingly, contributed largely to our geographical knowledge of Siberia—men such as Djeschneff, who discovered Bering's Strait long before the voyage of Bering; Liakoff, the first known discoverer of the southern group of the New Siberian Islands, named after him; Andreieff, who gave the first information of the existence of the Bear Islands; Staduschin, Schaluroff, Bachoff, Lapteff and others, who have helped to unroll the map of those far-off lands. Many of these men did not possess the knowledge or the means of publishing their travels to the world at large, nor indeed did they undertake their voyages for scientific purposes. Their names and deeds have for the most part remained unknown until explorers and *savants* of later times have brought them to light.

But there is another band of men who should still less be forgotten—heroes and martyrs, who under the most adverse circumstances have done noble service in the cause of scientific research within the vast regions of the province of Yakutsk. I mean the scientifically-educated political exiles, who have been sent to different parts of that remote and inhospitable country. A full description of their work in the cause of science, not to speak of civilisation in general, both in Yakutsk and throughout Siberia, would fill several volumes. The scientific services rendered by the political exiles have indeed been unique. The official work, however valuable, has always had this drawback, that scientists have gone out on the expeditions *as officials*, of whom the natives are afraid, and almost invariably without any knowledge of the native languages. Both these circumstances are, of course, great hindrances in the way of scientific travel. The "politicals", on the other hand, coming among the natives as their equals and friends, [1] have the immense advantage of at once being *en rapport* with the people among whom they live, and, knowing their language like their own, they have thus been enabled to study the everyday life and customs of the natives in a way that the Russian official traveller could never have done. Many prominent politicals have used these opportunities for studying the languages and traditions, the habits and ideas, the social and religious organisations and so forth of the

[1] The natives make a sharp distinction between common criminals and political exiles.

natives, and many of them have received official recognition of their work. Among these may be mentioned Bogeras and Yochelson, who have made linguistic and ethnographic researches among the Tschuktchis; Kudiyakoff, who published a very valuable ethnographical work on the Yakuts of the region of Verkhoyansk, and who, after a long and painful exile, lost his reason and died in Siberia; Mainoff, who has received the highest tokens of recognition from scientific institutions for his eminent researches concerning the Buriats; Schklovsky—better known by his pseudonym of "Dioneo"—who contributed most valuable ethnographical studies and descriptions of the natives of northern Yakutsk; Tscheraschevsky, who, for his great work on the Yakuts, was awarded the gold medal of the Imperial Geographical Society; and others. Within the domain of natural science also, the political exiles have done noble service.

Take, for example, the meteorological observations made at Verkhoyansk, – a most important place, as it is the thermometric north-pole of the earth, the coldest known point in our hemisphere. Such observations were made only occasionally by passing scientists, till in 1887 the political exiles S. Kovalik and Voynaralsky, after having served their term of hard labour in the terrible convict-prisons of the Kharkoff province, were exiled thither, and carried out a most comprehensive and systematic series of observations, thus furnishing science with invaluable material. The East Siberian branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society sent out meteorological instruments to different points in

Siberia, entrusting them to the care of political exiles, and thus got valuable reports; and it profited by the intelligence and industry of these people in many other ways. But many, if not most of them, worked in the scientific field of their own initiative.

Life has been a *via dolorosa* to these heroes of light, and often it has had a tragical end. Many of them have succumbed to privations and to the hard climate, some have lost their reason, others have in despair committed suicide. At best they have returned to Europe with their lives for ever ruined.

A typical example of these martyr scientists was the geologist A. L. Tschekanovsky. Endowed with uncommon talents and energy he finished his studies at the university under circumstances of much hardship and privation, and afterwards, while earning a scanty living by practical work, he devoted all his spare time to scientific researches, until, during the troubles of 1863, he was banished to Siberia as a political offender. In irons and fetters he had to march on foot from Kieff to Tobolsk together with common felons. Fortunately he had in his company a friend of his, Mr. N. Hartung, who, like himself, was an enthusiastic naturalist. On their way, to quote an account of his life which appeared in the journal of one of the Russian scientific societies, they had to live in the most miserable circumstances, not seldom suffering from utter want. Those having any knowledge whatever of the exile system know what those "most miserable circumstances" mean! Yet,

EXILE-LADEN PAUSKI ON THE LENA.

even under such conditions, and being watched at every step by their guards, Tschekanovsky and his companion were true to their mission as scientists, making a rich collection of insects. With the aid of a magnifying-glass, which they themselves made from a fragment of a broken decanter, which they ground and polished, they classified the ants they had collected. This and other similar occupations helped to keep up their courage in the midst of the nameless misery of their march, and both of them reached Tobolsk safely. On the way between Tobolsk and Tomsk, however, where they arrived at the beginning of the winter of 1864, Tschekanovsky was attacked with typhus fever, and his state was considered to be hopeless. He recovered, but the disease left its traces, which lasted for life, and doubtless in the end contributed to his premature death.

He had not even fully recovered, when he was sent on to Irkutsk, and in May 1865 he arrived at his place of exile in Transbaikalia. In that region, which offered so much of the greatest interest to the naturalist, he had to spend a year under circumstances which made it impossible for him to devote himself to any scientific researches whatever. In 1866 he was transported to a distant village on the river Angara, east of Irkutsk, where he suffered from the direst want, having to work as a common day-labourer for the poor peasants. Yet, even under such circumstances he did some very valuable geological work, contrived to make various scientific collections, and, in addition, occu-

pied himself with meteorological observations, for which he himself constructed all the instruments.

In this forlorn corner of the world he was visited by the well-known academician, Fr. Schmidt of St. Petersburg, who, after energetic endeavours, finally succeeded in obtaining permission for him to devote himself exclusively to scientific work. Commissioned by the East Siberian branch of the Imperial Geographical Society, he now made very important geological explorations in the province of Yakutsk during the years 1870—71. In 1872 he worked out his great plan of investigating the unknown river-systems between the Yenisei and the Lena, and in the same year he was commissioned by the above-mentioned society to undertake an expedition which was to last for two years. During the first year he was to explore the valley of the Lower Tunguskaya, and in the second the river Olenek. For this work he was granted the inadequate sum of 3000 roubles. To this expedition was joined the astronomer, T. F. Müller, and 700 roubles were added for him, besides which he received 900 roubles from private parties. With these small means Tschekanovsky carried out his plan in its entirety, and returned to Irkutsk in the beginning of 1876 with valuable results from his expedition.

Through energetic and persistent petitioning on the part of various scientific societies, Tschekanovsky was finally pardoned, and returned to St. Petersburg in the spring of 1876 in order to arrange and classify his rich material. He also visited Sweden to compare his collections

with those made on Spitsbergen by the Swedish expeditions.

He now conceived the plan of a new expedition for the exploration of the river-systems of the Anabar, Katanga and Piasina, but this was destined never to be carried out. Tschekanovsky had long suffered at intervals from attacks of melancholia, the result, doubtless, of his terrible experiences in exile, and during one of these, on the 30th of September, 1876, he committed suicide by taking poison.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM YAKUTSK TO THE LOWER LENA.

THE Lena and its Scenery—*Ospa*—The Tunguses—The Shaman Spirit-World—Schigansk—Bulun—The "King" of Bulun—Slavery and Famine—Fish and Fisheries of the Lower Lena.

ON the 17th of June we left Yakutsk for the Lena delta in the steamer *Lena*, accompanied by Mr. Gromoff, junior, the representative of the firm of Gromoff of Yakutsk, owners of the vessel, Mr. Pichtin, and a Kossack officer, Mr. Kondakoff, whom the governor sent with us as interpreter and guide. The little steamer *Lena*, which has had several different owners since, 22 years ago, it made its memorable voyage in company with the *Vega* around northern Asia, has been very badly used. Still it is even now the only steamer which is able to stand the storms on the Lena between Yakutsk and the Arctic Ocean.

Having received its great tributaries, the Aldan and the Vilui, the Lena gives the impression of an interminable broad inland lake with many islands rather than a river. Often the surface of its waters fades into the horizon, and the distance between its shores widens to as much as fifteen miles or more. In stormy weather, the motion of

CLIFFS ON THE LENA SHOWING OUTCROP OF COAL.

the vessel and, maybe, the sea-sickness which accompanies it, contribute to create the illusion that you are on the open sea rather than on fresh water.

Having passed the mouth of the Vilui, one gets the first sight of the snow-clad Verkhoyansk mountains far away to the east, the outskirts of which, cut through by the Lena, form the *Utesi* or "strand mountains." The country is utterly wild and desolate. The trees become smaller, the woods thinner. North of the Vilui the pine is no more seen. Near the polar-circle the spruce ceases, and yet a little farther north the beech, until finally only the hardy Siberian larch remains and continues all the way to within a few miles of the Lena delta.

On the shores of the river were heaped masses of drift-wood, and here and there, even though we were at the end of June, lay colossal blocks of ice. In the steep cliffs rising from the shore and composed of yellow and whitish sandstone, are seen layers of coal of varying thickness. Immediately north of Schigansk they have a thickness of as much as eight or nine feet.

Day after day we went down the gigantic river without seeing any other signs of man than fox-traps, a lonely cross over some grave on the top of a conspicuous rock or promontory, or a little group of tents and yurtas at the mouth of some tributary stream where fish were in especial plenty.

Some 500 miles north of the city of Yakutsk we met with the first Tunguses. They were "fishing Tunguses,"

living in primitive tents on the shore, below a group of yurtas which have not been inhabited since—some ten years ago—the fearful *Ospa*, as small-pox is called, raged in that region, exterminating the majority of the inhabitants. *Ospa*, according to the opinion of the natives, is an evil spirit, which has entered the country with the Russians, and in the shape of an old Russian woman lurks in the forests in order to steal into the yurtas of the natives. Woe to the families living in the regions where the *Ospa* makes her appearance! Like wildfire she flashes from one yurta to another, from one camp to another, scourging the people, until their bodies are covered all over with red and black spots, and they finally die! And there is no help against her devastation. The Shaman is able to exorcise the native evil spirits, but against the fiends brought into the country by the Russians—*Ospa*, syphilis, and others—he is powerless. In this place, for example, a Shaman had tried to drive away the *Ospa*, but without success. Then there came another Shaman, one of "the strong ones," and he shamanised night and day for three days, several times attaining the ecstatic state, until he at length fell into a stupor from which he never awoke. Shortly after his death *Ospa* disappeared. Thus the Shaman —so the natives believed—saved them from the fearful *Ospa* by the sacrifice of his own life. [1]

[1] The Tunguses, who had moved there afterwards, dared not live in the huts where the terrible disease had made such havoc, but pitched their tents on the shore of the river below them.

It may be said with truth that it still remains for scientists to determine the anthropological and ethnographical relations of the several native races and tribes in Siberia. Without entering into the different theories with regard to the ethnological position of the Tunguses, it may

TUNGUS YURTA ON THE LENA.

be as well to state here that the latest investigations made by savants—for the most part political exiles—who have for many years studied this interesting people, do not confirm the theory that the Tunguses are "essentially a Mongolic people." There is a wide gulf, not only between the language of the Tunguses and that of the Mongols,

but also between their physical characteristics. The well-built symmetrical figures of the Tunguses, with admirably proportioned arms and legs, are in sharp contrast with the somewhat clumsy forms of the Mongols, who have disproportionately short legs and arms. The former people, too, have thin lips, while those of most Mongols are thick and everted.

Nor do the moral characteristics of the Tunguses show much approximation to their Turki neighbours, such as the Yakuts. Thus the unimpeachable honesty and straightforwardness of the former, who will take care to pay, not only their own debts, but also those of their dead forefathers, make them an easy prey to the less scrupulous Yakuts, not to speak of the rapacious merchants and dealers in strong liquors, who swindle them at every term. Their contact with so-called "civilisation" has, of course, made sad havoc among them, having reduced many to the most abject poverty with all its accompanying misery. But among the really nomadic Tunguses, who have not degraded into pure ichthyophagy, [1] but live as all of them did in former times, on the meat and the milk of the reindeer, you will always meet with a natural honesty and pride which forms a very pleasant contrast to the deceitfulness and mendacity of most of the other natives. If you give

[1] When the Tunguses lose their herds of reindeer they sink into the most abject poverty, and are thus obliged to live almost exclusively on fish. The term fish-eaters, therefore, has become among them synonymous with pauperism.

a present to a Tungus of this type, he will not receive it unless he can give you a present in return, often of much greater value. This, at least, is my experience of this people.

TUNGUS WOMAN.

I had occasion to meet with some Tunguses of the last-named type, who in summer-time come down with their reindeer-herds a thousand miles and more from the forest-regions near the Vilui to the shores and islands of the

Arctic Ocean, and I found them to be a highly interesting people. Their wiry and well-knit figures contrasted sharply with the short-legged clumsy Yakuts. Their gait was elegant, and at the same time showed an alertness and agility as quick and charming as the motions of their reindeer. They also dressed tastefully, and some of their women carried themselves like queens. Their manner and address, too, seemed to me to breathe something of the serenity and quiet of the endless forest.

But, unhappily, the number of these people is diminishing very fast, and if some radical change for the better does not take place in the administration of the natives, their end will be only a question of time, and the Tunguses, like so many other native tribes of Siberia, will be counted among the extinct races of mankind.

The religion of the Tunguses is a mixture of Shamanism and nature-worship. All the peoples of northern Asia belonging to the eastern branch of the Ural-Altaic family were formerly Shamanists. At present Shamanism is generally practised only among the Tunguses. The Mongols, through Tibetan influence, are almost without exception strong adherents to Buddhism, only the Buriats living west of the lake of Baikal having become Shamanists.

To give an exact description of Shamanism is very difficult, because it has no written records [1] and the oral traditions are very varying and contradictory. It must be

[1] There is, however, a manuscript in Chinese describing some of the Shamanistic ceremonies.

added, moreover, that the adherents of Shamanism themselves have very foggy ideas about their religion, and their priests, the Shamans, from fear of the Russian authorities or for other reasons, refuse to betray their secrets.

During my travels in northern Siberia I gathered some most interesting information from educated persons who had spent several years among Shamanists, studying their mode of life and religious ideas, and later I came in contact with Shamans. My observations in this direction I will describe later. Here I will only give a general description of the principal tenets of Shamanists, as far as they are at present known.

The universe, according to their opinion, consists of a number of layers or strata, which are separated from each other by some kind of intermediate space or matter. Seven upper layers constitute the kingdom of light, and seven (or more) lower layers the kingdom of darkness. Between these upper and lower layers the surface of the earth, the habitation of mankind, is situated; whence mankind is exposed to the influence both of the upper and the lower world, i.e. the powers of light and of darkness.

All the good divinities, spirits, and genii, which create, preserve, and support the weak children of men, have their abode in the upper layers, in the world of light. In the layers of the lower world the evil divinities and spirits lurk, always seeking to harm and destroy mankind.

In the highest layer, "the seventh heaven", the great Tangara, or Ai-Toion, as he is called in northern Siberia,

is enthroned in eternal light. He is perfect and good, or rather is exalted above both good and evil, and seems to meddle very little with the affairs of the universe, caring therefore neither for sacrifices nor for prayers. In the fifth (or ninth) layer of the lower world the fearful Erlik Khan, the Prince of Darkness, sits on a black throne, surrounded by a court of evil spirits and genii. The intermediate layers are the abode of divinities and spirits of different degrees of light and darkness. Most of these are the spirits of deceased men. All spirits exert influence on the destiny of man either for good or for evil. The children of men are unable to soften or to subdue these spiritual beings, whence the necessity of Shamans, who alone possess power over the spiritual world.

The first real settlement we came to was Schigansk, situated about 700 miles north of Yakutsk, on the left bank of the Lena, at the mouth of its tributary the Strekàlovka. This place, now only consisting of a church served by a "pope" and his lay helper, and four yurtas with a couple of native families, was once the centre of administration and trade in the immense district of Schigansk ("Schigansky Ulus"), comprising the area between Lat. 65° and 73° N. and Long. 127° and 148° E. According to tradition, a band of robbers attacked the place some 80 years ago and slaughtered nearly all its inhabitants. Those who escaped fled down the river and founded the new settlement of Bulun, 500 miles to the north, and this latter

AT THE CHURCH PORCH, SCHIGANSK.

place has now become the administrative and commercial centre of the district.

The climate of the district of Schigansk is, of course, very severe, the thermometer not seldom registering 70° below zero, or even lower, in winter-time. In the summer, however, the temperature, at least in the southern parts of the district, may reach 68° Fahr. or more. This was the case when we stopped at Schigansk. I took a bath in the river, which showed a surface temperature of 53° Fahr., while on the shore were still lying immense blocks of ice. Before we took our departure the priest kindly held a short service in the quaint little church to pray for the prosperity of our voyage.

Our next stopping-place was the above-mentioned Bulun —the "capital of the king". For although nominally under the sway of the Tsar, yet in reality this vast district, like all these distant regions of northern Siberia, has up to the present time been governed by a merchant. In some places, however, the rule is shared between two or, maybe, three "kings". "God in heaven, the Tsar in St. Petersburg, and Ivan the merchant in Bulun." This saying among the people on the lower Lena no doubt contains a great deal of truth. In the "capital" of Bulun there is the church with its priest, there is a civil officer and the "*uprava*" or police-court, there are about 40 yurtas with some 200 natives, and in the midst of these towers the palace of the king, in the shape of a large Russian *izba*. The stranger is courteously invited into the palace, and is

shown much hospitality in the shape of vodka and dried reindeer-meat, vodka and *jukkala* (dried fish), vodka and boiled fish, vodka and *stroganina* (frozen fish), and vodka and *ikra* (caviar). The walls of the reception-hall in the palace are covered with costly and shining *ikons*, and in the *peredny ugol* (the right corner) a lamp is constantly burning in front of the image of St. Nicolas. The king now and then reverently bows and crosses himself before one or the other of these many saints. He evidently stands on good terms with all of them and with *niebesni Tsar*, the Heavenly Tsar, who, he himself humbly and gratefully acknowledges, has bestowed great blessings upon him. "I have not even learnt how to sign my own name," the king proudly remarks, taking me to his store-house to show me his treasures, "but look here, and see if the good God has not blessed my undertakings!" and he points with pride to an immense heap of mammoth-tusks, worth many thousand roubles, and a large pile of skins of white foxes, blue foxes, and even black foxes, worth goodness knows how much more. Yes, the "Heavenly Tsar" has indeed blessed his favorite, so that he is said to be worth some £50,000 or so. But judging from all appearances and from the testimony of those who ought to know, the king is also on the best of terms both with the representative of the earthly Tsar in St. Petersburg—the local civil officer, and the representative of the Heavenly Tsar—the priest, who do not hinder him from adding to his treasures, even if the ways and means of doing so

should happen to clash with the laws of heaven and the ukases from St. Petersburg. Friction and collision can easily be avoided by sharing the blessings.

But in these blessings—the mammoth-tusks, the fox-skins, and the sables, etc.—the unfortunate natives have no share, albeit they have been the means whereby their white rulers have acquired them. Quite the contrary; the very process of acquiring them, if it be not stopped or changed, will sooner or later exterminate the greater part of these people. To describe this process fully would fill a whole volume. I must therefore limit myself to some of its principal features. The natives are kept perpetually deep in debt to the merchant king, who treats them as his own property. They are to all intents and purposes his slaves. In order to pay their debts for strong spirits of the worst possible quality, for tobacco, tea, cloth, or whatever it may be, the natives are often obliged to neglect to provide for their own necessities by tending their reindeer herds, collecting stores of dried fish etc., and have to devote nearly all their time to hunting and trapping, or to making dangerous excursions to the islands in search of mammoth-tusks. The price of the natives' furs as well as of the trader's goods are alike fixed by the latter individual, who takes good care to make a double profit.

The poor natives are constantly kept on the verge of famine and in nameless misery, being absolutely dependent on the merchant's "clemency". This is, in short, the real cause of the terrible cases of famine which so often occur among

the natives of northern Siberia, and which at times have led to cannibalism among the Ostiaks and the Samoyedes on the Taimyr and west of the lower Yenisei.

Very often not only the agents of the merchants, but also the priest and his wife carry on an unlicensed sale of strong liquors among the natives, and thus "the messengers of salvation to the heathen" help largely in the work of their systematic extermination. Thus, for example, a number of barrels filled with spirits, each one marked with the mysterious name of Orloff, were on a certain occasion unloaded from the steamer at a place, which shall be nameless, on the lower Lena. The barrels lay on the shore a whole day without being confiscated by the local representative of the law! During the night, however, they disappeared and soon reached their real destination, the house of the "*matuschka*" (the priest's wife) of the place. This, of course, I did not witness, but there was no doubt of the fact that she always had some means of "making people happy" who visited her, and brought furs with them.

On the lower Lena a large number of the natives are occupied with fishing in summer-time, enormous shoals of different species of the salmon family going up the river from the sea during this period. Among these may be mentioned the Nelma *(Salmo leucichthys)*, the Taimen *(S. fluviatilis)*, the Muksun or Moksun *(Coregonus muksun)*, the Omul *(C. autumnalis)*, and the Sik *(C. lavaretus)*.

The natives generally catch the fish by means of small floating nets, usually made of horse-hair. Sitting in his

vetka or dug-out canoe, the fisherman floats along with his net, watching it carefully. When he observes that a fish is fast in it, he quickly pulls up the net, gaffs the fish with an iron gaff, kills it with a small wooden mallet, throws out the net again, and floats on as before.

Of late the seine has been introduced by the merchants, who carry on fishing on a large scale with native labour. The catch is salted in large barrels and transported in craft called "kayuks" some 1800 miles up the Lena to Olekma and Vitim, and thence to the gold-fields, where it is sold at prices varying between 10—15 roubles a pood. When sailing is impossible these kayuks are towed by natives up the river, the trackers hauling sometimes from the bank and sometimes in the water, with the tow-ropes over their shoulders. The natives as a rule obtain as pay for this work the free transport of some 20 or 25 poods of fish.

Native labour here has often the character of the corvée. If the native is in arrear in the payment of his taxes, the authorities simply hire him out to work in the fisheries, taking his earnings to pay his debt to the crown. As the taxes are very high there are always a great many natives in arrear, and as a consequence plenty of cheap labour. As a curiosity it may be here stated that the natives have to pay taxes, not only for themselves, but also for their dead forefathers. This was explained to me in the following way. The natives are taxed according to some old census of the population, and not according to their actual number at the present time. Now, more than half of

the population has been exterminated by small-pox and famine since this census, but each native chief is still responsible for all the taxes of his district. It is certainly a fact that the taxes have to be paid in very irregular proportions; thus while one man had to pay 10 roubles in taxes, another in the same neighbourhood had to pay about 20 roubles.

A wealthy Irkutsk firm, the Gromoffs, owners of the steamer *Lena*, has for the past two or three years been trying to establish fisheries on rational principles and on a large scale at the Lena delta, but hitherto it has only incurred losses, mainly owing to the difficulty of obtaining efficient labour and reliable persons as managers of the undertaking. The immense distance from the markets, and the bad quality as well as the expensiveness of salt (obtained from Vilui and Ust-Kutsk), add to the difficulty of profitably carrying on this business. The time, however, will no doubt come when fish-curing establishments will be profitably worked on the lower Lena, but hardly under the present *régime*.

CHAPTER XIV.

AMONG THE NATIVES ON THE LOWER LENA.

Our Plans for the Arctic Journey—Lodkas and Vetkas—The "Christian" Russians—Native Graves—A Tungus Dance—Story of the *Jeannette*—Bulkur—Ancient River-terraces—"Rock-Ice."

ON our arrival in Bulun, at the end of June, I obtained information from natives who had returned from the New Siberian Islands in April that no traces of the Andrée Expedition had been seen there. I also had news to the same effect from reliable persons who during the winter had met with nomadic natives roaming about on the coast of the polar sea east of the Lena as far as the Indigirka, and west of it as far as the Anabar; an immense region, covering a distance of more than 2000 miles.

I accordingly resolved to proceed westward from the Lena across the Olenek, Anabar, and Katanga rivers and the Taimyr peninsula to the Yenisei in the hope of finding some trace. I considered it important to make personal enquiries of the nomad tribes of this vast extent of country in order to learn where they had been during the last two years; if they had observed any traces of Andrée; and also to interest them in the search by promises of reward in

the case of any discovery relating to the Expedition. This long journey over tundras, marshes, lakes, and rivers could not be commenced before the autumn, when the cold had set in and made it possible to travel in sleighs. I intended to start in August in a *lodka*, or open boat, go through the Lena delta and over the sea to the mouth of the Olenek, and there wait until the rivers and lakes became frozen. The interval until August was to be spent on the lower Lena and in the delta. This programme was afterwards carried out, except that the boat-journey could not be commenced before the middle of September. After an adventurous and dangerous passage of 300 miles through the labyrinths of the delta, we were thus, as the reader will learn, unfortunately cut off by the ice on a small uninhabited island in the Arctic sea, 120 miles from the mouth of the Olenek.

One great drawback in travelling on the lower Lena and in the delta was the impossibility of obtaining really strong and good boats. The splendid lifeboats of the *Lena*—the first steamer that ever entered the river from the sea—have all been destroyed and replaced by a couple of miserable "boxes." The common *lodkas* on the river are very clumsy boats, made from coarse planks sawn by hand, and fastened together by means of wooden pegs. The *vetkas* or dug-outs of the natives, formed of the trunk of a species of alder, are very well made and are excellent for their purpose, but they do not carry more than one man, and are, of course, only suitable for river work.

KARA ULAK RANGE, LOWER LENA.

On my first trip down the Lena from Bulun to the neighbourhood of the delta, I and my two comrades accompanied the civil officer stationed at the settlement. The boat was of the usual miserable kind. Travelling in such craft on this huge river is not without its dangers. Below the city of Yakutsk the Lena often increases to a width of twenty miles or more, and where it forms numerous islands to as much as thirty. In the northern part, especially between Bulun and the beginning of the delta, the shore is very steep, in many places indeed quite perpendicular. In the sudden storms which so frequently arise here, many a boat has been wrecked against the rocky cliffs—an occurrence which actually happened with this very boat on its return voyage. The occupants, among whom was the civil officer, barely escaped with their lives.

When any official or priest travels in these regions, the natives are in duty bound to transport them gratuitously, but they are not necessarily masters of the sailor's craft. The native boys who served as our rowers did not know how to handle the oars. In general, though they are very clever with their canoes, they do not know how to manage a rowing or sailing-boat. To the great astonishment of these natives, who evidently had not seen any "*oloshon toion*" —Yakut words meaning "great lord"—handle the oars, my companion set to work and showed them how to row. After this they soon learned to row a little better.

On our way down the river we stopped at several fishing-stations with native huts very much resembling the sum-

mer huts of the Laplanders. We were invariably treated by the hospitable owners to "jukkala" (sun-dried and sometimes smoked fish) and other delicacies; we in our turn presenting them with tea and tobacco.

At one of these stations I witnessed a touching scene. It was the home of one of the boys who accompanied us as rowers. His parents seemed to be above the average with regard to intelligence and cleanliness. When we were about to leave, I overheard the mother seriously talking to her son in a half-whispering tone. Understanding very little of the Yakut language, I asked our interpreter—a Kossack officer, who stood by me—what she was saying. Somewhat reluctantly he explained that the good mother was warning her son that he "*should be on his watch against the evil ways of the Russians*". At the very next station I had an opportunity of observing that this warning of the heathen mother against the evil ways of Christians was not superfluous, for here we found all the natives dead drunk, one of the "Christian" Russians having recently been there, selling vodka to the poor people.

Besides the great harm which liquor does among the natives, there is the evil influence of criminals to be reckoned with, the worst class of whom are let loose among these innocent people, who have to keep them in their homes. These unwelcome "guests" of course invariably play the part of masters, demoralising both young and old, and not seldom both morally and physically ruining the girls.

On the tops of the hills near the river native graves are

often to be seen, their "headstone" a simple wooden cross. The majority of the natives are nominally Christians, and pagan burials without crosses are now forbidden. Besides, there is the belief spreading among the "Christian" natives, that the Resurrection Angel will not recognise their graves if he does not see the cross over them. But even

TUNGUS GRAVE ON THE TUNDRA.

these "Christian" burial-places show signs of heathenism in the children's toys, the skulls of the reindeer, the sleighs which were used in transporting the dead to their last resting-place, and other belongings of the deceased with which the graves are decked.

In spite of the official prohibition of pagan burials, pagan graves both old and new, as well as the graves of the Shamans, are still to be found in secluded places in the

forest or far away on the tundras. For besides this prohibition, there is another reason for burying the Shamans in out-of-the-way places—namely, the belief that their spirits, which are considered to be dangerous, are always hovering about their graves, which therefore must be avoided.

At the Tungus village, Kumak-Surt, picturesquely situated on the western bank of the river with the Kara Ulak mountains abruptly sloping down into the water on the farther side, I spent some interesting days. The natives were comparatively well off and showed us much kindness, and I had an opportunity here of seeing the only dance practised among the Tunguses in these regions. Taking each other under the arm, both men and women circled around with the sun, at the same time turning their bodies from right to left, chanting in monotonous tones the words: "*Ek Kario! Ek Kario!*" the meaning of which they did not know.

At this place I met with the Yakut Androssoff, who in 1881 saved the lives of Noros and Nindemann, members of the *Jeannette* expedition. The reader will perhaps recall the sad story: how the steamer *Jeannette* having been crushed in the ice and sunk on the 12th of June, 1881, in lat. 77° 14′ 57″ N., long. 154° 58′ 45″ E., north-east of the mouth of the Lena, Captain De Long and his men, in three boats, made their way amid a thousand dangers and great hardships over and through the ice between the New Siberian Islands towards the Lena delta; and how, finally, the three boats were separated by a storm—one of them being no

ANDROSSOFF'S HUT AT BULKUR.

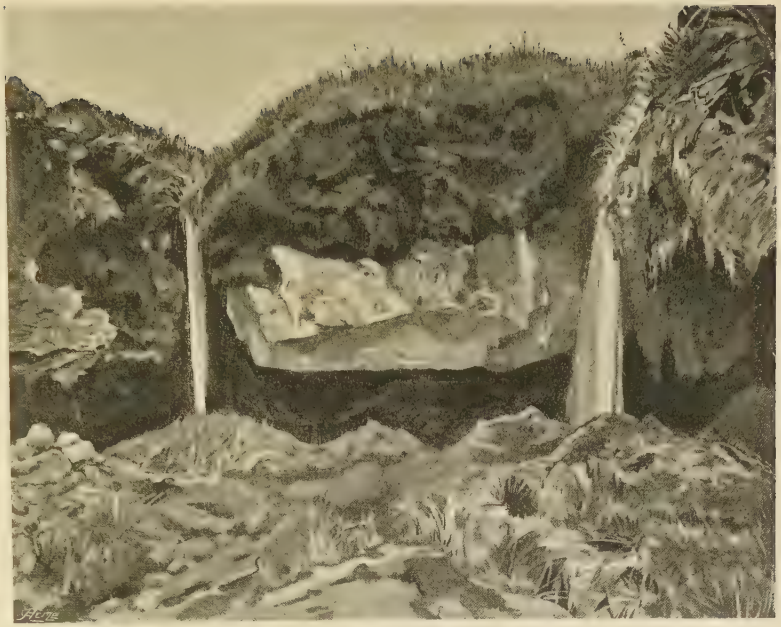
more heard of; one, under the command of the engineer Melville, safely reaching the mouth of the river and finding people; while the third, under the command of De Long himself, reached the delta near Saga-Styr. Not succeeding in finding natives or in procuring food, De Long's party, after horrible sufferings, died from exposure and famine, with the exception of the above-mentioned two men, Noros and Nindemann, who, being sent in advance by Capt. De Long to try and reach Kumak-Surt for relief, after dreadful privation, finally got to the hut of Androssoff at the small river of Bulkur, where they no doubt would have perished but for Androssoff.

It was on the 9th of October, 1881, that De Long ordered Nindemann and Noros to start on their march, and on the 19th of the same month they reached the hut in a terribly exhausted state, having lived mainly on pieces of skin and willow-tea. Here they found some half-rotten remnants of fish, which they greedily devoured. They intended to proceed further, but their strength failed. At noon on the 22nd of October, as they were seated by the fire, they heard a noise outside like a flock of geese sweeping by. Nindemann looked through the crack of the door and saw something moving, which he took to be a reindeer. He took his rifle down, loaded it, and was moving forward, when the door opened, and a man stood at the entrance. According to the American report of the event, the native, seeing Nindemann advancing towards him with his rifle, fell on his knees, threw up his hands, and begged for his

life. This the native in question, Androssoff, told me he did not remember, only that "the strange men stretched out their hands, which I grasped" (to use his own words). Androssoff, having nothing to eat with him, hurried back to the camp for food and another reindeer sledge, and the starving men were thus brought to the friendly Tunguses at Kumak-Surt and saved. If the natives had comprehended the signs of the strangers and hurried to the delta in search of De Long and his party, some of them might have been saved, but they understood them to refer to Melville's party, of the safety of which they had been informed, and they therefore brought the half-dead men to Bulun instead of going to the north.

Old Androssoff carries on his chest the medal which the United States government bestowed on him, in addition to other rewards, for this truly philanthropic act of his.

From Bulkur, where I stayed for some time, I made several excursions in different directions, as far as it was possible to do so amid the terrible storms of rain and snow which rage almost all the summer in these regions. As mentioned above, the Lena has here worked its way through the Kara Ulak mountains. On the western side of the river, where Bulkur is situated, the ancient beaches of the gigantic river form terraces for a distance of about ten miles or more inland, and through these old river-banks the tributaries of the Lena, like the river Bulkur, have cut their way. One day, following the latter river some six miles to the west, I left its valley and ascended to the



ROCK-ICE WEST OF THE OLENEK.

highest of these terraces or ancient beaches. Here, ten miles from the Lena and about 600 feet above its present level, in a layer of soil composed of turf and mud mixed with sand, resting on a foundation of solid ice as clean and blue as steel and of unknown depth, I found large quantities of drift-wood, evidently brought down by the river at the remote period when it had its course here. The length of this period may be imagined from the gigantic work performed by the river since that time: wearing down the Kara Ulak mountains, about 1000 feet in height, little by little, and thus moving its course eastward some ten miles or more.

Later I found this *boskaya*, or "rock-ice", as the natives call it, on the tundra west of Olenek, with a layer of earth above, in which the natives had found both drift-wood and remnants of the mammoth. This, as well as similar discoveries made on the New Siberian Islands, prove that this "rock-ice," and the drift-wood in the earth resting on it, belong to the period of the mammoth, or even previous to it. The photograph I took on this occasion may help to give an idea of this remarkable phenomenon.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH THE LENA DELTA.

More Delays—Nilson bids us Adieu—Tit-Ary—The Stolb—Monument Cape—Cross erected to De Long's Party—"Prince" Vinokuroff—Migrations of Reindeer—Winter overtakes us—Storms and Gales—Tora—Life with the Tunguses—A Tungus Orator—Ytang—Tungus Marriage Customs—Fighting the Polar Storms—Frozen-in at last.

As I have already said, I originally intended to start for the Lena delta on my way westward in August. This plan, however, could not be carried out because the steamer *Lena*, by which we were to receive mails, was belated over three weeks. Finally it arrived on the 15th of September. After some hesitation on account of the lateness of the season, I ultimately resolved to try and carry out our plan. On the 17th of September, our *lodka* having been mended and strengthened as well as our resources permitted, Mr. Frænkel, the Norwegian Torgersen, and myself parted with the other member of our little expedition, the botanist Mr. Nilson, who was to return with the steamer *Lena viâ* Yakutsk, and started with three natives on our somewhat risky journey to the north.

The weather, which had been horrible all the summer, was fair on the day of our start. Rowing energetically

and aided by the current, we made good progress. We soon passed Tit-Ary, the island of larch-trees, situated some twelve miles north of Bulkur, so named because of some scattered groves of these trees upon it. I had visited this island during the summer. The natives living there were extremely poor and much given to drinking, vodka being smuggled among them by an "agent" of their own people. Thence we hugged the most northern outskirts of the Kara Ulak range to their furthest point at the beginning of the delta, where, at the mouth of the majestic river, the weird-looking lonely "Stolb" or Pillar-mountain, the Gibraltar of the Lena, towers up from the surrounding waters to the height of 1000 feet. Here we camped on a sandy island opposite the "Stolb," having made about 60 miles in twelve hours. The still night was illuminated by the most magnificent northern lights, against which the three Shaman graves on the top of the "Stolb" showed off their dark contours. The sky was clear; only to the north there loomed up from the Arctic sea a dense wall of fog, above which the rays of the aurora played like a flying cavalry of fire, the gorgeous phenomenon with its flaming draperies and coronas being mirrored in the still waters round about us. During the night the temperature sank to 14° Fahr.

The following morning, while making our way northwards through a maze of channels, we were suddenly swept into the midst of a dense and chilling Arctic fog. Having several times lost our way, we finally reached Monument Cape in the afternoon. This hill, a remnant of the above-

mentioned mountain-chain which has been worn away by the river, has received its name from the fact that Capt. De Long and his comrades were buried on its summit, though their bodies were afterwards moved to America. A large wooden cross marks the place where they were interred. I went to the spot, and happily the fog dispersed a little, so that I was able to take photographs of the hill with its cross, and the surrounding landscape of the delta.

On the cross is the following inscription:—

In
Memory
of
12
of the
Officers and Men of the U. S. Arctic Steamer
JEANNETTE,
Who Died of Starvation in the Lena Delta, October
1881.
Lieut. G. W. De Long,
Dr. J. M. Ambler,
Mr. F. F. Collins,
H. H. Erichsen,
W. Lee, Mate,
A. Gortz,
A. Dressler,
G. Boyd,
N. Iversen,
H. Kaak,
A. H. Sam,
Alexey.

NATIVES AND DOGS AT TIT-ARY.

Monument Cape is a barren rocky promontory, the perpendicular face of which overlooks the dreary wastes of the delta towards the north-east. It was nearly dusk when I reached the top, where the awful desolation and silence was broken only by a howling wind, which chased the cold Arctic fog over the wild-looking and dreary delta-land. From the summit, the island Boren-Bjelkoi, the scene of the heroic sufferings and tragic deaths of Capt. De Long and his companions, is visible some twelve miles away.

With a mingled feeling of sadness and admiration I looked at this rough monument of one of the most pathetic of all the tragedies in the history of Arctic exploration, so rich in traits of true heroism and devoted courage.

About a mile south of Monument Cape there are a few yurtas with a couple of Tungus families, amiable and nice people with whom we exchanged gifts. We photographed them before we parted, and their cheers reached us far across the water as we started on our way in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. After hard rowing for some three hours we finally reached Orto Stan, the occasional home of the chief of the western district of the delta. It was dark when we arrived, but Vinokuroff, the chief, came down to the shore to meet us. He was dressed in full uniform, a kind of brown jacket reaching to the knees, and round his waist a gold-embroidered belt to which was attached a short sword, the sign of the dignity of "kujas" or "Prince", conferred by Catherine II. on the native chiefs of northern Siberia.

Vinokuroff received us kindly. He had heard of our expedition, and had expected us in August. We had come, he said, too late in the season. Travel in the delta was too risky now, and it would be very dangerous to try and

MONUMENT TO DE LONG AND HIS COMRADES OF THE "JEANNETTE."

cross the sea at this time of the year in an open boat to the mouth of the Olenek. The channels and the sea might freeze any day. He had only women at home; all the men being away hunting the wild reindeer. On account of the bad weather they had not been able to kill any at

his place, and they were therefore short of food. We were, however, invited to his hut, where all the women and children of the place assembled, whom we treated to tea, dried black bread, and tobacco.

During the night we had a long talk with the chief about his people and their manner of life. Formerly the inhabitants of the delta had numbered about 1000 souls, but about ten years ago nearly half that number had perished from the terrible small-pox, so that the whole population at present is not much more than 500. These are divided into groups, each under an "elder," somewhat after the fashion of the Russian peasant communities. They lead a nomadic life, moving from place to place according to the conditions of fishing, hunting, and trapping. In the spring, that is to say in the latter part of June, with the arrival of the geese and other sea-birds, the natives go out to the islands of the delta in their small canoes to gather eggs, and later on in the spring to catch the wild-geese by means of nets, enormous quantities being thus taken.

The greater part of the eggs and flesh of the geese are spoilt, but the down is always carefully kept to be sold to the merchants. During the whole summer they catch fish in the channels and in the lakes on the islands. The summer heat and the mosquitoes in the taiga of the south drive thousands upon thousands of wild reindeer to the shores of the Arctic Ocean, and especially to the delta with its innumerable islands. In the fall these beautiful animals, now fattened, return southwards, swimming in

large herds over the channels at certain fixed places, known to the natives from time immemorial.

At these places the natives lie in wait for the animals, and when the herd is swimming over, the hunters in their vetkas make a sudden attack upon them, killing the deer sometimes by scores at a time with their iron-pointed wooden spears. Every year at least 1000 reindeer are thus killed in the Lena delta. Then there is the white polar fox, which the natives catch in traps. Late in the fall, i.e. in September, when the reindeer-hunts are ended, the Tunguses go in their vetkas to the islands and the shores of the Arctic Ocean, putting up their fox-traps for the winter. Later still, when the channels and the sea have frozen, they move to their large winter-villages, such as Bykoff-Myss, in the eastern part of the delta, Turak at its western border, and Balkalak near the mouth of the Olenek. All these villages are situated at places where there is winter fishing, with which the natives occupy themselves during this season, using ice-nets. As means of transport the people of this region use dogs instead of reindeer. Sometimes the winter fishing fails, and then their dogs are decimated by famine, which means great losses, and the natives themselves also suffer famine from the same cause. This year there was a famine of this nature in the Lena delta caused, it was said, by the absence of strong northerly winds, which seem to drive the fish up to the mouths of the large rivers.

During the night snow fell on the frozen ground, and

IN THE LENA DELTA.

the temperature of the water, only three degrees above freezing-point, showed that its surface might become ice-bound at any moment. The chief, having listened to my recommendations from the Russian government, promised to accompany us on our way until we should meet some of his people.

Pulling away energetically down a winding channel in a north-westerly direction, we made about 50 miles next day, and camped for the night in company with two young trappers, whom we met while engaged in getting our boat afloat from one of the shallows, in which it had run aground. The next morning was clear and calm, and I took a picture of the party and of our boat at the starting-place. Soon, however, the wind got up and within two hours it was blowing a gale. We had a hard and unpleasant struggle to save ourselves from a catastrophe. The water of the channel, here about seven miles broad, was lashed to foam by the fierce wind, which threatened every moment to smash our miserable box of a boat against the steep frozen shore. The natives were frightened, and I had to use both kind and strong language to get them to work with us at the oars at the most critical moments. Finally, however, we reached the station of Tora in safety.

To our great disappointment we did not even here find the men at home. We had now some 90 miles to the next "station" where there were people, and we were in sore need of men to help us to row our heavy boat.

The distances proved to be much greater than we had expected, owing to the fact that at this late season of the year we were obliged to follow very crooked channels through the delta, whereas, had we started earlier when the water was higher, we might have taken a much less tortuous route.

Again we had a very cold night. All the lakes and marshes on the islands had already frozen, and ice began to appear in the large channel we were to follow.

At Tora there was plenty of provision, at all events of reindeer-meat, and the hostess of the hut where we lodged showed us great hospitality. As usual, I was invited to the place of honour in the right-hand corner of the yurta In the meantime the hostess and her daughter were busy sweeping out the place and preparing food for us. She then took a low table, brought a kind of plane, and planed it in lieu of scrubbing it, making it look quite new, while the daughter cut shavings from a piece of willow-bark, which were used as napkins! Finally, the table was placed before us, and dried reindeer-meat and frozen reindeer-marrow were served in a large wooden bowl, and frozen fish in another. I, in my turn, treated our hostess and the other natives to tea, dried bread (the only vegetable food in our possession besides some cocoa and oatmeal) and tobacco.

During the night a fierce storm raged, which, however, quieted down a little in the morning. The chief now said he could not go with us further, having no winter clothes

with him, and fearing lest his wife should suffer for want of food during his absence. Finally, however, he consented to accompany us at least part of the way to the next station. At our start the wind was favorable, and we were able to make good progress for a few miles, until we came to a turn of the channel, when we got an unfavorable wind and had once more a very hard struggle to save the boat from being swamped. A new reach of the stream happily made our task easier, and a few hours later we met five of the chief's men paddling along in their picturesque vetkas, which were loaded with fresh reindeer-meat, the men having had the good luck to kill about 30 reindeer on the previous day. At the chief's order they all returned and accompanied us to a sheltered place, where we landed in order to hold a "palaver."

Before many minutes the natives had a fire going, and had put on the kettles for boiling tea and meat. In the meantime the chief held council with them. He told them the story of our expedition and expressed great fears as to the results of it, pointing out its dangers so late in the year. I began to fear that we should get none of the men to accompany us, when, lo! a man by the name of Kusma, occupying some subordinate office under the chief, unexpectedly came to my rescue. Kusma had travelled far and wide, had seen and experienced much. He had been as far east as to the Indigirka, where he had met with Tschuktchis; he had been in company with the Norwegian Mr. Torgersen, our interpreter and pilot, on an island off

the mouth of the Olenek in the summer of 1893, watching the dogs bought for Nansen, while waiting for the *Fram*,

KUSMA.

which, however, did not come that way; and he had been in Bulun and seen different "tchinovniki" (civil officers) etc. Like other Yakuts, he was gifted with eloquence and

liked to talk. Now Kusma rose and made the following strong speech, addressing himself to the chief:—

"Thou art a coward," he said, "and like a coward thou talkest! Dost thou believe that the great Tangara (god) has sent these '*oloshon jurokdakjon*' (Yakut: meaning 'great and learned men') and '*surdakjon*' ('marvellously powerful men') to this land to seek their lost brothers and will let them perish from storm and cold? Twee! (and he spat scornfully on the fire). No!" he continued, "I for one will go with these remarkable and great men, be it life or death."

This speech had a powerful effect on its hearers and resulted in two more of the men offering to go with us. Then the chief himself resolved to go some way further also, sending back a man with reindeer-meat for his wife. Our talk over, we bade adieu to the others and continued on our way, the picturesque flotilla of the native vetkas disappearing in the cold fog which came sweeping up from the north.

About 8 o'clock in the evening of the following day we arrived at a place called Balagan Syr, where we put up at the yurta of a widow, who hospitably invited us to reindeer-marrow and frozen fish. The poor woman commenced telling us about her great loss in the death of her husband, but soon her voice was choked with sobs, and she cried bitterly like any other good widow in civilised Europe. Her youngest son had now taken charge of the home. According to the curious custom among these

natives the *youngest* son alone succeeds his father, inheriting not only his belongings, *but also his debts!* The other sons, and perhaps the daughters too, may receive some gift, or else nothing. If there be only daughters, then the inheritance goes to the youngest living brother, or the nearest male relative of the deceased.

On the following day we worked hard, rowing against strong winds. We ran aground several times on sandbanks and had to wade in the ice-cold water to get the boat afloat again, and on one occasion were within an ace of getting swamped. Finally, a blinding snowstorm compelled us to seek shelter and protect ourselves as best we could during the bitterly cold evening and night. We were unfortunately without proper winter clothes, the native who had promised to make them for us having disappeared, and consequently we suffered severely. During this day we passed the island of Boskaya, consisting of pure ice, with a stratum of earth and driftwood resting on it.

In the morning the storm had quieted down, and we started early. When we were under way, the wind got up again, but happily from the right quarter, so that with occasional hard rowing and the aid of the wind and the current we went along at a great pace and made about 50 miles in 7 hours, reaching a place called Ytang in the afternoon without any more serious adventure than getting the boat half filled with water in spite of constant baling. At Ytang we found very good yurtas and nice hospitable people. In the family with whom we put up there were

TUNGUSES OF THE LENA DELTA.

two good-looking young daughters, who had recently been wedded, but they would have to remain another two months before their bridegrooms could take possession of them. According to the curious custom among this people, it would be in the highest degree improper for a young couple to live together before three months had elapsed from the time of the marriage ceremony.

The process of marriage here is usually the following. When the father wants a wife for his son, he either goes himself or sends some one of his trusted friends to find a suitable girl. When one is found, the price to be paid for her must be settled with her father. When the parties have agreed as to the price, the first instalment is paid. The second instalment is paid at the wedding, and the full payment is concluded when the married couple live together. In spite of the mercantile character of marriage here, I have often observed evidences of real and warm affection between man and wife among these natives, and still more so between parents and children.

The lot of the married woman, however, is undoubtedly a hard one among these people. Her duty it is, not only to bear and bring up children, but to make and mend the clothes for the whole family, make tents and pitch them, gather and chop wood, take up ice and melt it into water for family use, prepare food, etc., and help the men in their hunting, fishing, and trapping occupations.

During the night a fearful storm once more raged, but it abated a little in the morning. The chief now told us

that he had reached the border of his district and must return home. Having ordered his men to faithfully accompany us "in life and death," he received payment for his services and presents.

This was the last inhabited place in the delta we should meet with. There remained some 160 miles to the mouth of the Olenek, and of this distance about 100 miles were over the open sea. It was therefore with some hesitation that we contemplated committing ourselves in our "box" on so hazardous a voyage, but there was no time to lose, and we had to make our decision quickly. The strong wind being favorable we resolved to run the risk, and accordingly started as quickly as we could, followed by the cheers and good wishes of the natives. With the aid of our primitive sail we made very fair speed in the strong wind. We were most anxious to reach the last island in the delta on that day, so as to be ready at the first favorable opportunity for the attempt to cross the sea to the mouth of the Olenek. We never stopped for rest or food, but worked away all the time, eating some frozen fish while at the oars. In the evening after having made some 56 miles, we reached the small uninhabited island of Kangelak, the furthest western island in the Lena delta. Here we found a number of yurtas, of which we selected the largest and best. In Yakut fashion we put ice instead of glass in the window-openings, mended the fire-place and the chimney, and soon had a splendid fire with the tea-kettle and meat-pot boiling over it. Only Arctic travellers will

understand what a luxury this means after a whole day's uninterrupted and arduous fight with the grim polar storms.

Our hope of being able to reach Olenek before the sea froze was, however, not to be realised. Within two days we had full winter with a temperature of 15° Fahr. below zero!

CHAPTER XVI.

ICE-BOUND IN THE ARCTIC SEA.

Frozen-in on Kangelak—Native Habits—We send for Relief—The Dolgan Nalthanoff—Arrival of the Relief Party—Sledge Dogs—We start for the Olenek—Sledging Mishaps—An Arctic Post-Office—We reach the Olenek.

Our party thus entrapped on the island of Kangelak consisted of eight persons—namely, Mr. Frænkel, Mr. Torgersen, five natives and myself. There was nothing to do but to try and make our captivity as tolerable as possible until we could take measures to obtain relief.

The yurta provided good shelter, and there was plenty of fuel in the shape of driftwood. We also had some provisions—some cocoa, tea, and coffee, as well as tobacco; and as mainstay a few pounds of rye biscuits, the greater part of which, however, had become mouldy during the wet summer. But this was to last us all the way to the mouth of the Yenisei! We had, too, some reindeer-meat, but this would not last long, and there was no possibility of shooting anything before the sea was sufficiently frozen to make it possible for us to get to the delta in search of ptarmigan and reindeer. The natives told us, it is true, that some years ago the polar-bears had visited this island

occasionally, but we could not rely on their kindness to appear and sacrifice themselves on our behalf. Happily our men had brought two small nets with them, and soon the ice between the island and the delta became sufficiently strong to walk on, and permit us to set the nets beneath it. Early every morning they were overhauled, and on almost every occasion we had the good luck to catch three or four fish, weighing from one to three pounds or more, and thus we were daily provided with one form, at least, of excellent diet.

Occupation was not lacking either. The Yakut who had promised to make us winter clothes from reindeer-skins had disappeared and thus added to the long list of tailors' sins, but in the delta we had been fortunate enough to buy several skins, and these were now dried, tanned as well as that operation could be carried out under the circumstances, and made into winter furs for us by the natives. We Europeans occupied ourselves with various matters, such as meteorological observations, trips in search of game, —which, however, had no other result than a few ptarmigan —preparations for our ensuing journey and so forth.

In the long dark evenings, while the storm was raging outside, we would sit about the fireplace in the yurta and listen to the Shaman legends of the natives, or to the stories of their adventures. Happily, we were all in good health, except for the fact that I was more or less a sufferer from rheumatism.

Living together with these natives in the same yurta, we

had plenty of opportunity of observing their manners and customs, and of studying their ideas. Generally speaking, they were decidedly cleanly in their habits. Every morning they washed themselves regularly. Having melted the ice in a tea-kettle, they filled their mouths with water, which they spirted into their hands and washed themselves. Having performed this operation, they placed themselves before the *bilerik*, i.e. the left corner of the yurta, which is by custom reserved for guests, and commenced bowing and crossing themselves at a rapid pace. There was no saint's image, but the pictures of Baron Nordenskjöld and Andrée, which we had hung on the wall, served the same purpose. Their orthodoxy, however, was evidently not very deep, for on seeing that we did not cross ourselves, their zeal cooled considerably. Their faith in the power of the Shamans over the evil spirits was evidently stronger than their belief in the efficacy of the sign of the Cross.

In their sleep these people would often sing or rather howl in the same manner as they do during the "functions" of the Shamans. I have never in my life heard people make so much noise in their sleep as the natives of northern Siberia, for when not indulging in these extraordinary performances they would manage to produce the most remarkable of snorings and gruntings, which at times culminated in a sort of general pandemonium, in which we Europeans would join *rotundo ore* to awaken the dreaming performers, and put an end to the concert.

Having spent nearly two weeks on the island, and the

WE DESPATCH OUR NATIVES FOR ASSISTANCE.

ice having become strong enough for sledging, we sent two of the natives back some 70 miles to the delta to procure people and dogs for our passage across the Arctic Ocean to the Olenek. Fearing, however, that through the lateness of our start, added to the still further delay on the island of Kangelak, we might not be able to reach the mouth of the Olenek before the native nomads returned southwards to their winter haunts in the forest, I considered it necessary to send if possible a message to the Olenek as well, in order that we might get some of the Tunguses to delay their departure, and thus obtain reindeer for our long journey over the tundras of the Taimyr Peninsula. Mr. Frænkel having volunteered to accompany one of the natives on this mission, it was decided that they should travel along the western border of the delta in a southerly direction to the mainland, and then follow the coast of the Arctic Ocean westward to the Olenek, taking advantage of the yurtas, which are from time to time met with along the sea-shore, for shelter. This plan, as the reader will learn, was successfully carried out.

On the fifteenth day of our imprisonment the Dolgan Nalthanoff arrived, coming from the delta with his little boy of five years old in reindeer-sledges. Nalthanoff, an old acquaintance of our interpreter Mr. Torgersen, was a great bear-hunter, and when he was informed that I had killed a number of polar-bears I rose greatly in his estimation, and we interchanged pipes as a sign of hunting brotherhood. Nalthanoff, like most

of the Tunguses, had killed his bears with an iron-pointed wooden spear.

One afternoon, after seventeen days' captivity had elapsed, a distant howling of dogs was heard, which struck upon our ears like the music of a relieving army, and far away in the dim twilight appeared an indistinct dark mass, which came sweeping over the ice like a whirlwind towards the island. In a few minutes we were surrounded by nine natives with as many sledges and a hundred and ten howling, yelling dogs. Our messengers sent back to the delta for relief had fulfilled their mission faithfully, and the day of our deliverance had come.

At daylight the following morning, the 11th of October, we were ready to start upon our journey over the Arctic Sea. The thermometer showed 13° below zero, and an unpleasantly strong wind was blowing. Fortunately it was from the east, and therefore favourable. The distance over the sea to the mouth of the Olenek was about 120 miles, but owing to the strong wind and the rapid falling of the barometer it was decided that we should take a southerly direction across the sea, which would enable us to reach the mainland in one day, and then proceed over the tundra to our destination.

The dogs were strong and fat, having lately had plenty of food in the shape of reindeer and fish, the season of the hunting of wild reindeer in the Lena delta having just closed. According to my own observation and that of others, the dogs of the region of the Lena and Yana

THE DOLGAN NALTHANOFF AND HIS SLEDGE.

rivers are stronger and hardier than the majority of Samoyede dogs. Their general appearance, and especially their coat, resembles very much that of the wolf. The tail is not curly as in the ordinary dog, but hangs down like that of the wolf; they do not bark like the dog, but have a distinctly wolf-like howl, and when you are awakened by their regular howling at midnight every night, you can hardly free yourself from the impression that you are listening to a chorus of wolves.

To each sledge with its ordinary load of, say, 450 lbs. twelve or thirteen dogs are as a rule attached. Unlike the Samoyedes and the Greenlanders, who fasten each dog to the sledge by means of a separate leather rope, the natives in the region of the lower Lena use one common trace, made of leather, to which the dogs are attached on each side by means of short thongs, while at the end is harnessed the *peredovoi*, or leader. This plan has the advantage of preventing the dogs from becoming entangled in a multiplicity of ropes, but, on the other hand, a certain amount of traction-power is lost owing to the trace of each dog forming an angle to the common trace. The dogs are steered, not by reins, but by word of command from their lord and master, which they obey very well as long as they do not scent any game; but if they are hungry and get the scent, for instance, of a reindeer, they will rush away after it until little is left of the sledge behind them but splinters. To check the pace or stop the dogs the driver ordinarily uses an iron-shod pole as a brake.

To the music of the howling dogs and the yelling natives our caravan started at breakneck speed from the island. Every now and then a dog would slip and lose its footing on the smooth ice, and sprawling over on its back or side would be dragged along in this fashion for some distance by the others. As we proceeded, a long range of huge *torosses* came in sight—great masses of heaped-up ice like miniature bergs—which we approached at a rapid pace. "How on earth are we to get over these?" I was asking myself, when, lo, we are in the midst of the foot-hills, so to speak, of the icy mountain-chain in front of us. The air is filled with the howling of the dogs and the shouting of the drivers, who yell out their commands to their teams: "*To the left!*"—"*To the right!*"—"*Straight on!*"— while the "dog-chiefs" in front, pricking up their ears to catch the commands of their masters, turn now to the left, now to the right between the "torosses," the sledges jumping and dancing behind them over huge blocks of ice. Now we come to the first chain of ice-mountains. Wildly howling and yelling, the dogs, like a forlorn hope on the point of assaulting a fortress, rush up the huge masses of ice and down on the other side. With my heart in my mouth, and my feet drawn up to protect my limbs from getting broken—for such an accident would not have been too pleasant in these regions—I could hardly tell how this mountain-pass was negotiated before the whole caravan was safe on the smooth ice once more. Then a new chain of ice-mountains rises in front of us,

CROSSING THE FROZEN OCEAN TO OLENEK.

and the dogs rush onwards and upwards in the same way, until a sharp voice yells out in front: "Stop! Stop!" The whole caravan stops, we jump from our sledges and run to the spot. Here is a business with a vengeance! The sledge is all in pieces, and the things loaded on it are scattered far and wide over the ice! I become nervous, but the natives, as tranquil as if nothing had happened, set to work repairing the sledge by means of a primitive drill, making a hole here and another one there and binding together the broken parts with leather thongs, while others with axes and iron-pointed poles are cutting out a way for the caravan over the torosses. In half an hour the expedition is again on its way. Other chains of torosses are crossed in the same manner more or less successfully, and our journey over the sea on the whole goes quickly and well.

Towards noon we were enveloped in a heavy snowstorm, but the ice became smoother, and the dogs ran onwards at great speed. Only once did we take a short rest, sitting down in a circle on the ice and regaling ourselves with frozen fish, while the dogs fed beside us on the same delicacy. In places where the wind had swept away the snow, the crystallised salt, precipitated from the ice by the cold, made the driving very heavy.

Nearing the mainland in the afternoon, the snowstorm ceased, leaving the view of the country clear. Towards the south-east and south extended a mountain chain falling abruptly into the sea, diminishing in height to the west.

These mountains form the outskirts of the Verkhoyansk range, through which the Lena has cut its deep channel. The range continues to the north-west, until it is abruptly cut off by the sea.

We turned towards the west and followed the shore, on which were heaped immense masses of driftwood. The region was desolate and dreary beyond all description. No traces of man were to be seen, and only here and there the track of a fox or wolf. We stopped not long after at a promontory, on the slope of which was a series of sticks and poles, placed in groups or singly in a certain order, at various distances from each other, some of the poles having mysterious marks cut on them, others having incisions in which splinters were stuck, pointing in different directions. These sticks and poles represented, as it were, the letters and newspapers of this lonely land, and our drivers studied them carefully. From them they learnt that this place had been visited during the summer by Tunguses, hunting the wild reindeer; that a fox-trapper from Olenek had passed a few weeks before on his way westward; and that a Dolgan, who had visited the place, had seen polar-bears in the vicinity. Our drivers in their turn contributed to these "open letters," putting up new sticks and poles in order to inform future travellers about our journey.

Having followed the shore some fifteen miles westward, we left the sea and turned over the hills into the tundra, across a large promontory. Here we saw a large herd of

reindeer on a ridge in front of us. Happily, however, the wind was favorable so that the dogs did not get their scent. The animals, of course, soon got ours, and, taking alarm at the aspect of our caravan, they speedily disappeared.

Late in the evening we reached a primitive winter yurta at Krestovsky Myss—the "promontory of the Cross"—where we spent the night. At this extremely wild and desolate spot—which may be said to form the western limit of the Lena delta, the sandbanks formed by the westerly branch of the river reaching as far as to this place, where the sea suddenly becomes very deep—immense quantities of driftwood were heaped upon the shores, and here the natives have erected a yurta to serve as shelter on their journeys between the Lena delta and the mouth of the Olenek. We at once encamped, and the dogs, now very tired, lay quietly scattered about the sledges between the trunks of driftwood around the yurta. I got out my camera, and managed in spite of the feeble light and cloudy weather, to take a photograph of the dreary scene by long exposure of the plate. A small cache or store-house, not far from the yurta, where the natives had placed some reindeer-meat and other things, had, we found, been torn down by polar-bears, and the contents eaten up, leaving some pieces of skin as the sole relic of their feast.

At five o'clock next morning we started on our way over the tundra towards the Olenek. The shortest way to the mouth of this river would have been in a westerly direction, but the natives declaring that the northern part

of the tundra was cut through by deep ravines, and otherwise difficult to traverse, we took a south-westerly direction over an undulating tundra with several small lakes and marshes. Having reached the divide between the Arctic Ocean and the basin of the Olenek, we suddenly came upon a herd of reindeer, which caused us more fun than we wished for. Scenting the herd, the dogs started after it at tremendous speed, without paying the smallest heed to the commands of their masters, the sledges jumping and bounding over the ice-humps, stones, and crevasses of the frozen soil. I had the greatest difficulty in balancing my sledge so as not to be thrown out and left on the tundra. Happily the dogs took their way along a valley which narrowed into a ravine, and here they had perforce to stop.

Late in the night we arrived at Volkalak, 12 miles south of the mouth of the Olenek, where we found three yurtas and three families of natives.

CHAPTER XVII.

ACROSS THE TUNDRA TO THE ANABAR.

Natives of the Olenek—Prontchischtschev's Grave—A Tungus Chief and his Reindeer—The Reindeer-Nomads—Reindeer and Sledges—We start for Anabar—The Routine of Tundra Sledging—"Rock-Ice"—Tameness of Birds—Wild Reindeer—Poverty and Epidemics.

THE sparse population on the lower Olenek have their yurtas on each side of the river, and on the hills further away from the shore, where they take refuge when inundations occur. These natives, who are most hospitable and honest folk, are a mixed race of Yakuts and Tunguses, and a few of them have a little Russian blood in their veins from the peasants sent to these distant regions during the reign of Catherine II. The region about the lower Olenek is also visited by the natives of the western parts of the Lena delta, who spend the winter fishing at the mouth of the Olenek; and Tunguses come here in summer-time with their herds of reindeer, travelling distances of from three hundred to a thousand miles from the forest-regions in the south. At Olenek there are a number of *ambar* or small store-houses erected long ago by the above-mentioned Russian peasants. These people soon succumbed to the hard climate, and the few survivors became assimilated with

the natives without leaving any other traces than a trifle lighter complexion than usual, and sometimes a little beard on the faces of their male descendants. Themselves uncivilised, they could not of course exert any civilising influence on the natives.

From Volkalak I made a pilgrimage to the grave of Lieutenant Prontchischtschev and his wife, who after an heroic attempt to sail from the mouth of Lena westward around Cape Tscheliuskin, were obliged to return, and died from scurvy in September 1737, at the mouth of the Olenek. In the vicinity of a small group of yurtas on the most northern point of the neck of land east of the river, at its mouth, I found their grave, over which stood a rude and dilapidated wooden cross, so rotten that the next Arctic gale must have levelled it with the ground. "To the sad fate of Prontchischtschev," says Baron Nordenskjöld in his "Voyage of the Vega," "is attached a unique interest in the whole history of Arctic exploration. He had recently married when he started on his expedition. His young wife accompanied him, sharing his dangers and privations. She survived him only two days and now slumbers by his side on the desolate coast of the Arctic sea."

It was twilight when I reached the spot, and while I was taking a photograph of the lonely grave, a number of natives came running from their yurtas, and stopped at a distance, looking on with shy astonishment at the mysterious doings of the stranger.

On account of our delay on the island of Kangelak

I was much afraid that we should not reach the mouth of the Olenek in time to find any of the nomadic Tunguses, who come there with their herds of reindeer in the summer and return to the south in the autumn. Happily one of these nomads, the Tungus chief Androssoff, was still camping with a herd of about 1000 reindeer some twelve miles west of Volkalak. Shortly after our arrival he paid us a visit, bringing with him presents of reindeer-meat and frozen reindeer-milk, which were very welcome to us after our long diet on mouldy rye-bread and fish.

We now had a long parley with the chief as to the ways and means of carrying out our plan of crossing the tundras between the Olenek and the mouth of the Anabar, a distance of about 320 miles over a frozen desert with no natives and no yurtas. To this he demurred considerably, as neither he himself nor any other natives that he knew had ever passed over this immense tundra in winter-time. In the summer, too, the custom is to follow the sea-coast, where there is plenty of driftwood, but the country in this part being so rough and so much intersected with ravines, it would be impassable in the winter with sledges. He was willing to take our expedition southwards to the forest-region, and then westward to the Anabar, some 350 miles south of the sea; but I wanted to go in as northerly a direction as possible in order to meet the native nomads of this part of coast of the Arctic Ocean, and learn whether they had observed any traces of the Andrée expedition, hoping to induce them, by promises of reward, to be on

the look-out in the future for any such traces. "It will be a risky undertaking," explained the chief. "The tundra is enormous and full of dangers. Wolves may come and scatter the reindeer during the night, when we should be left to perish; storms may arise and compel us to stop at the same spot for several days, or even weeks; the reindeer may get away, and we be left for ever on the tundra." Then followed a long series of stories about natives overtaken by wolves and storms on the tundra, of narrow escapes after terrible suffering from hunger and exposure, of disasters and lost parties, etc. The worst part of the stormy season, which occurs when the sun disappears, *i.e.* in the middle of November, had not yet come, but storms might overtake us for all that.

I now appealed to the magnanimity of the chief, telling him that "I was seeking my lost brethren," and asking him to share my dangers for such a noble purpose. This had the desired effect, and he at once gave in, explaining that he had already heard about our expedition, and thereupon solemnly promised to do all in his power to transport our party over the tundra to Anabar. He agreed to equip a caravan of about 40 reindeer with the necessary number of sledges, a tent of reindeer-skin, and two loads of wood, and he also promised that he would himself go with us and take two of his best men with him. Throughout the interview the chief's quiet manners and dignified speech impressed us all greatly.

After a long and comical palaver with the Yakuts from

the delta, who are very fond of making long speeches, and having administered medical aid to some sick persons, we took a solemn farewell of our dog-drivers and of the good people of Volkalak, and started for the camp of the Tungus chief, where we arrived after dark, finding about 200 fine reindeer collected round the tents.

The chief had pitched a special tent for us, where we put up. Later in the evening he made me understand that I would do him a great honour if I would come and spend the night in his own tent. I at once accepted, and on moving in with my things I was welcomed with that genuine and cordial hospitality which characterises the real Tunguses. Later on my companions were invited, and we were all treated to delicious frozen fish, reindeer-marrow, frozen reindeer-milk,—which with hot tea is most nutritious and excellent—and boiled reindeer-meat; we in our turn treating the family to tea, tobacco, and a glass of rum. Both men and women wore dresses of reindeer-skin, the high boots and the pelts being tastefully ornamented with glass beads, etc. The chief and his wife had healthy, good-looking children, for whom they evinced much affection, the children in their turn showing reverential attachment to their parents. The chief's mother also lived with them. She was 80 years old, and blind, but otherwise hale and lively, talking and laughing with the rest. Not only in this instance, but everywhere during my travels in northern Siberia I have invariably found that the genuine pagan reindeer-nomads stand on a much higher level physically,

intellectually, and morally than, for instance, the "fishing-nomads" and other natives who have more or less come in contact with so-called civilisation, and are nominally members of the orthodox Church.

It was arranged that the chief's family should move south with the reindeer-herd a distance of some 400 miles, to the border of the forest-region, where the chief would join them after having transported our expedition to Anabar. Accordingly in the forenoon of the 14th of October the caravan was ready for the start. To each of the eleven sledges were put two reindeer, and to my sledge and that of the chief three reindeer abreast. The sledges, which were long and broad, were held together by means of leather strings and sinews instead of nails; and strong traces of leather were used instead of shafts. Each driver used a long wooden pole, somewhat like a fishing-rod, partly to urge on the animals, and also partly to steer them. Besides the 24 reindeer put to our sledges, there were 15 running loose as spare animals in case of accidents. All of them were fine, strong animals, and we started with great speed over an uphill country from the valley of the Olenek. Our caravan took a south-westerly direction over an undulating tundra with a great many rifts and ravines in the frozen earth, resembling the crevasses of a glacier. Suddenly a dense fog, laden with ice-particles coming with the northerly wind from the Arctic sea, settled over the desolate region we were crossing, making it impossible for us to see further ahead than the horns of the reindeer pulling our sledges,

and rendering our journey both difficult and dangerous. Now and again the caravan would suddenly come to a full stop in front of a crevasse yawning before us, the bottom of which was completely invisible because of the fog. Then we would have to lead the animals long distances to find a way out of the labyrinth of these obstacles which seemed to surround us, or to discover a place where we

ON THE OLENEK TUNDRA.

could cross. Sometimes our sledges would fall through a treacherous bridge of snow and ice into one of these crevasses, out of which it and the animals had to be hauled and lifted as best we could. It was a wonder that no more serious accidents occurred than broken sledges, which were soon mended by the clever Tunguses, and it was no less remarkable that the natives never lost the right direction

during these circuitous journeys in the fog, having no other compass than their instinct.

Every now and then, when we came to a place which the natives recognised as having good and abundant moss, we would stop to rest for half-an-hour or so, and while the reindeer fed on the moss, we would sit down in a circle on the tundra and get a hasty meal on frozen fish, which was cut in slices and eaten without either bread or salt. A fat species of trout was a great delicacy, and proved a very nutritious and warmth-producing food. Towards evening we came to a series of lakes and marshes, over which we drove with great speed in spite of the dense fog.

In a place with plenty of food for the reindeer we camped for the night. Some of the reindeer were tethered with long leather ropes, the others were left free. A suitable spot was cleared of snow, and then the conical tent was pitched after the Lapp fashion, a flat stone being put in the midst to serve as fire-place.

The wood, which we were obliged to economise as much as possible, was chopped into fine splinters for cooking meat and tea, and after our meal we slept soundly on the outspread skins of reindeer, the tent affording a good protection against storms and cold. The next morning we found our reindeer in the neighbourhood of the camp, and having breakfasted as usual upon reindeer-meat, tea and reindeer-milk, we started once more on our journey.

In this manner we continued our way over the tundra day after day, the regularity of our progress only varied

by changes of weather and other minor circumstances. We were, on the whole, fortunate with regard to the former during our journey from Olenek to Anabar. On one night, but on one only, we were able to pitch our tent in the shelter afforded by a little valley, and we were nearly losing some of our reindeer, although the natives took turns in watching them all night long. During two days we had clear weather, which, though the temperature was about 22° below zero Fahr., enabled us to make a few observations in this part of the tundra, a region which I believe has never previously been traversed by man, at all events not by civilised man. Most interesting of all our finds, perhaps, was the discovery of ancient driftwood in a stratum of soil from four to seven feet thick, resting on pure ice of unknown thickness, here playing the part of rock, and therefore by the Yakuts very fittingly called *boskaya* or "rock-ice". The configuration of the localities where we found this ancient driftwood—which is not to be confounded with the so-called "Noah's wood" in the neighbourhood of the Arctic Ocean, which has been washed up by the sea when its surface was much higher than now—clearly indicated that they were ancient river valleys or bottoms of ancient rivers.

When we had got some 153 miles to the westward of the valley of the Olenek, and thus far away from the haunts of trappers and hunters, the ptarmigan became so tame, that numbers of these beautiful birds would light down in the midst of our caravan and sit on or among the

sledges while we were resting the reindeer; and owls would not move, although our caravan would pass close by the knolls where they were sitting blinking their eyes. Once during a storm a couple of white foxes were seen running between the sledges of our caravan; but of wolves we happily saw nothing save an occasional track here and there.

We met with plenty of wild reindeer, but these animals were very shy, and we only shot one. The natives hunt the wild reindeer with the aid of their tame brethren, bulls being specially trained for this purpose. When a herd of wild reindeer is seen, the trained bull, who has a long hide rope attached to his neck, is let loose. He immediately joins the herd and engages in a fight with one of the bulls. Before long the horns of the latter are sure to become entangled in the rope, and the hunter running up, is able to shoot or spear the animal.

On the divide between Olenek and Anabar were several lakes and marshes, and not so many fissures and rifts in the ground, which enabled our caravan to travel very fast, not only during the day, but also during the greater part of the night; and thus after a journey of nearly six days we arrived at the Anabar river, having made a little more than 56 miles a day, thanks to the admirable condition and strength of our reindeer.

Some twelve miles west of Anabar we found a camp with families of natives of a mixed race of Yakuts and Dolgans, all speaking the Yakut language. Both the animals and

we ourselves were now pretty well tired out, but being anxious to get over the tundras before the worst winter storms set in, I resolved to stop only one night here and start early on the following day. The chief of the place said it was "eleven days' journey with reindeer" from here to Katanga, *i.e.* about 500 miles, but it was my intention, if possible, to take a north-westerly course in order to meet

MY SLEDGE ON THE ANABAR.

the natives roaming about the tundras on the coast of the Arctic sea, near the mouth of Katanga Bay, and ascertain whether they had observed any traces of Andrée's party.

The people on the Anabar, I found, knew nothing whatever about the Andrée expedition, although all the natives of northern Siberia were said to have been informed of it. Nor had any other of the natives between the Anabar

and Yenisei had any warning of the possible arrival of the balloon or its occupants. These natives on the Anabar had during the summer roamed hither and thither on the coast of the Arctic Ocean seeking mammoth-tusks and tending their herds of reindeer, but they had come across no traces of the expedition.

In former times the Anabar people were said to have been well off, having had large herds of reindeer and plenty of nets for catching fish. Now they have been reduced to poverty by the Yakut agents of the Russian merchants, who have made them only too well acquainted with vodka. They soon become indebted to these unscrupulous people, and in order to work off these debts are obliged to spend almost the whole of their time in fox-trapping and collecting mammoth-tusks, and are thus unable to provide for their real wants. Now only a few families have a small herd of 200 reindeer or so, the rest living on fish or the meat of wild reindeer. These poor people, innocent as children, understood neither the value of money nor of their skins and furs, and accepted whatever the agents of the merchant were pleased to give them as payment.

We found a kind of croup and various other epidemics raging among them, which had carried off several individuals in a neighbouring camp. These distant regions are regularly visited by agents of merchants, and every other year or so by a priest, who sometimes combines the sale of vodka with his profession, but they never receive any medical

aid whatever. The poor natives use the excrement of geese and of men to cure wounds, and their method in cases of protracted labour is for two strong men to put a leather rope about the mother's waist, and pull with all their might, both mother and child, of course, often perishing in the process. Though some of them nominally belong to the orthodox Church, they are all strong believers in Shamanism.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE ANABAR TO THE KATANGA.

Day and Night behind Reindeer—Glories of the Aurora—Summer Wanderings of the Dolgans—The Wild Reindeer—Subjects of the "Great White Sun"—A Wandering Polish Noble—The most Northern Forest in the World—Arrival at Katangskoie.

THE following morning we parted with the chief Androssoff, and started with eight sledges and eighteen reindeer in a north-westerly direction over an undulating tundra intersected with numerous ravines. Having travelled about 44 miles, we crossed the river Saloma, after which the tundras become more level. In two places we passed a *zimovie* or winter hut, erected of driftwood brought from the sea, and serving as shelter for the natives travelling over the tundra in winter-time. Thus we continued from camp to camp, night and day, getting fresh reindeer at every camp and thus keeping up a high average speed. Near Balskoie Osero—"the great lake"—not very far from the mouth of Katanga Bay, we came to a populous camp composed of several families, mostly Dolgans—a mixed race between Yakuts and Tunguses. Being extremely fatigued from the journeying night and day, which exerts a constant strain on eyes, nerves, and muscles to balance the sledge and

avoid the crevasses, we stopped over the night with these good natives. They had never heard of Andrée or seen any traces of him. Our story of Andrée's flight to the far north was too wonderful to be true, but when Mr. Frænkel, in the clear night, sent up a toy-balloon to illustrate his story, their doubts were changed into wonder and fear, believing that we were some kind of great Shamans, who are held by them to be capable of flying through the air. The astonished natives were talking all night about that wonderful "flying through the air", and in the middle of the night they awoke our interpreter, Mr. Torgersen, and asked him: "What did those young men do up there in heaven, whither they flew with their balloon? Did they want to visit the great *Tangara* (the highest god)? Or were they going to see the northern lights" (which in the picturesque Yakut language are called "the sea-fishes playing")? Mr. Torgersen explained to them that the three young men wanted to come to a remarkable country somewhere far away to the north. Many people having made unsuccessful attempts to get there in ships, with dog-sledges, or on foot, these young men wanted to fly there, etc., etc. "Wonderful! wonderful!" mumbled the natives, as we dropped off again to sleep.

From this camp, situated about Lat. 73° 55′ N., near the mouth of Katanga Bay, we took a south-westerly direction over a flat tundra with many lakes and marshes. The reindeer which we got here were unusually fine and strong, and our caravan sped along over the desert of ice like a

whirlwind. The temperature had fallen to about 40° below zero, the sky was clear, and the flames of the magnificent northern lights spread their wavering glow over the desolate waste of snow. Stretching myself at full length on the sledge, I watched the flaming draperies and coronas in the sky, while the impressive silence was broken only by the crackling sound from the hoofs of the reindeer on the frozen snow, the light slither of the sledge-runners, and now and then the boom, as of a heavy cannonade, of the rending of the frozen earth under the strain of the intense cold. These were solemn occasions on the tundra, during which we were absorbed,—as indeed the least impressionable of individuals must have been—in beholding the splendor of the display, whose brilliancy was reflected in the sea of glittering silver over which we sped. As we gazed we hardly knew whether we were still on this earth of darkness and impurity, or whether perchance we had been translated to some more glorious sphere of light and purity, where the great Tangara is enthroned in eternal glory. From this lofty dream, however, I was suddenly aroused by an only too emphatic reminder of the earthliness both of myself and our journey, when my equipage – driver, sledge, reindeer and all—pitched headlong into a ravine, out of which I was only too happy to escape with my limbs unbroken, albeit with an ample share of bruises.

Near the mouth of the river Popigai we met with the Dolgan chief, Michail Antonoff, and his people, camping on the eastern shore of Katanga Bay. He had never heard

of Andrée, but he showed great interest in his wonderful flight to the north when it was sufficiently explained to him. He told us that his people and other Dolgans during the past summer had, as usual, been wandering on the Taimyr peninsula, having followed the western coast of Katanga Bay in search of mammoth-tusks, "so far north that the earth became black (*i.e.* void of all vegetation) and the wild reindeer ceased." In some places they had seen open water, but from the high mountains towards the west "immense icebergs extended into the sea." The chief had been told that his ancestors long ago had travelled "for several days northwards from Katanga Bay, until they had come to a large bay (Thaddeus Bay?) which was filled with ice." His people had, during the last summer, met with Samoyedes, who, with their herds of reindeer, had been roaming about in the regions between the river Balaknà and the Taimyr Lake, but they had not heard of any of these having had any knowledge of the Andrée expedition, or that they had observed anything unusual indicating traces of it.

These Dolgans live mostly by trapping and by hunting the wild reindeer, immense herds of which in autumn return eastwards from the Taimyr, where they spend the summer. In crossing the mountains east of the lower Katanga, these are caught in traps or shot by the Dolgans.

The chief showed much interest in our expedition, and in that of Andrée and his companions, which was the most wonderful thing he had ever heard of.

He asked the interpreter what kind of men we were. "They do not make the sign of the Cross, they do not swear or beat the natives, and they pay well for all services. Who are they?"

"They belong to a foreign country," said our interpreter; "they are Christians, but they do not make the sign of the Cross."

"But do not all men belong to the Great White Sun far away (the Tsar)?"

"No, their country belongs to another Great White Sun."

"How wonderful!"

We told the chief of the great interest our "Great White Sun" had taken in the expedition of Andrée, but this was misunderstood by him to mean that our king had "sent away those young men."

"What terrible crime had those young men committed, that your 'Great White Sun' should send them away on such a fearful journey?"

The chief believed that our king had *exiled* Andrée and his comrades as criminals, and a long explanation was necessary to make him understand that they were not criminals "exiled to the far north."

As we were ready to start, the chief delivered the following speech to his men:—

"You have heard what these strangers have told us, who have started on such a long and dangerous journey to search for their lost brethren; and now listen to what I say and command you to do. If you find their brethren

alive, you shall not kill them, but help them, because they are baptised Christians although they do not make the sign of the Cross.[1] If you find them ill, you shall give them warm reindeer-milk, boiled meat, and broth, and wrap them in warm fur clothes and bring them to the nearest camp. If you find them dead, you shall hide their bodies well from wild beasts, until they can be brought to the nearest official. Have you heard?"

"We have heard," replied the men standing around him.

On the tundra between the rivers Popigai and Bludnoie, near the mouth of Katanga river, we met with natives who were afraid of "travelling gentlemen." They were very poor and their reindeer too, and had suffered much at the hands of the merchants, who pay them next to nothing for their fox-skins.

In a camp on the tundra we came across a Polish nobleman, J. A. Tschernjak, who had been banished to Siberia during the revolt in the sixties, and had spent fifteen years on the tundra 1000 miles east of the Yenisei, leading the life of the natives and trading a little with them. He had now, in his old age, married a young Dolgan woman of 19, for whom, according to the custom of the country, he had paid a certain sum of money (45 roubles, it was said), and with her we found him living in a sledge, covered with a kind of tarpaulin and reindeer-skin, somewhat resembling an omnibus on runners.

[1] This chief, with his people, belonged to the orthodox Church.

With the exception of the occasional visits—perhaps once or twice a year—of merchants and officials, Mr. Tschernjak had during all these years lived entirely separated from all contact with civilisation, having adopted the manners and language of the natives. In 1875 he had met Dr. Nordenskjöld on the lower Yenisei and was very eager to learn the details about the voyage of the *Vega* around Asia in 1878—80, of which he had received very imperfect information. Talking with me, he spoke classical Russian, using turns of expression and phrases current only in high society, thus betraying the education and refinement which lay beneath the "barbarised" surface. He had become reconciled to his hard fate and wished to end his days on the distant tundra, which for so many years had been his home, and which at least had offered him the joys of liberty.

Mr. Tschernjak gave me a great deal of information about the manner of life among the natives, and the way in which they are being reduced to starvation by the merchants. He also told us that it would be very difficult for us at this time of the year to find these nomads, who were now scattered far and wide on the tundras. We soon had plenty of occasion to verify his statement, finding it most difficult to obtain reindeer from the poor natives on the lower Katanga, in addition to which the animals were very feeble from overwork.

A short distance south of Rybnoie, we came upon not the least interesting feature of this part of our journey—

THE MOST NORTHERN FOREST IN THE WORLD.
(Katanga River, Lat. 72° 46′ N.)

the most northern forest in the world. It consisted of dwarf and stunted Siberian larch-trees, which here grow in the valley of the Katanga as far as lat. 72° 50′ N., thanks to the comparatively warm summers in these regions, caused by the protection of the great peninsula of Taimyr extending towards the north-west, and also, perhaps, by the warm waters of the Katanga flowing from the south.

We now followed the Katanga southwards for some distance, but soon found that there were neither people nor reindeer, so we had perforce to leave the river and make for the tundra again in search of native camps. Sometimes, not succeeding in our search, we were compelled to stop and sleep in the open air in from 30° to 40° below zero, the poor natives having no tent for us.

At one place, where we had to stop a couple of days waiting for reindeer, there came a deputation, headed by a native chief, in the belief that we were "ambassadors of the Great White Sun," asking me to render them help and protection against certain merchants who treated them worse than slaves, forcing them to do transport service for nothing, and compelling them to spend all their time in trapping instead of tending their reindeer, though paying them next to nothing for the fox-skins when they brought them in.

At another miserable place, where a few poor people of mixed race were living, we should have had to stop perhaps for days, if a kindly Tungus had not chanced to arrive with some reindeer, and consented to take us over the

tundra to the next native camp, where he had a brother. Arriving at midnight on the following day at the place where he expected the camp to be, we found not a trace either of people or animals. Our Tungus accordingly left us alone on the tundra with a few reindeer, and immediately started with a couple of animals to hunt up the camp. Finally, after several hours, he returned, having succeeded

KATANGSKOIE.

in his quest. In the meantime we slept on the open tundra as best we could, in a temperature of 29° below zero. Arriving at the camp, we found a couple of very nice Tungus families. They were heathens, and complained of the way the "baptised people" treated them. As natives had done before, they wondered who we were, that we did not cross ourselves, or swear at them and beat them.

Eventually we arrived at Katangskoie, situated on a

high promontory on the eastern shore of the river. At this settlement, where officials and merchants are in the habit of meeting the natives once a year—usually in March —there are a number of yurtas, an old chapel, and a few storehouses. At the time of our arrival there were no inhabitants whatever. In the grave-yard, among the tumble-down wooden crosses, only the tracks of wolves and foxes were to be seen. Selecting one of the largest yurtas for our lodging, we made it as weatherproof as possible, and shovelled up snow about it to protect us from the cold, which was now so severe that the thermometer sometimes sank below the freezing-point of mercury.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE SHAMANS.

The Sign of the Cross—Confession and Fox-skins—Entry into the Shaman Brotherhood—A Shaman Séance—Spirits of Ancestors—Shaman Deities—Erlik Khan—A Shaman Triennial Gathering—Samoyedes as Converts—The Good Samaritan of the Tundra.

HAVING sent one of the men we had with us on to the tundra to find natives and reindeer to carry us on to the next stage of our journey, we arranged ourselves as comfortably as possible under the circumstances for a few days' rest in Katangskoie after the fatigues of the constant travelling to which we had been exposed.

Two of the natives stopping with us proved to be Shamans. Shamanism being strictly forbidden by the authorities, its adherents and "priests," the Shamans, are always very suspicious of strangers, and sometimes in their presence even make the sign of the Cross in order to hide their pagan heresy. Seeing that we did not cross ourselves, and one of the Shamans having been cured of fever by some medicine I gave him, they believed that we were not "orthodox", but, on the contrary, "some kind of Shamans" ourselves.

The Shaman who had been cured, a man of forty or so,

with a rather pleasant, sympathetic expression, now opened his heart to me and confessed that he was a Shaman.

"The priest has told me that it is wrong to shamanise, and perhaps it is, but I must do it both for my own sake and that of my people. I confess once a year to the priest and give him a blue fox-skin, and then he is satisfied, and I can tranquilly go on shamanising for another year. Maybe that the god of the "baptised" is mightier than our deities, but the orthodox priests are unable to subdue the spirits (*i.e.* to cure diseases), as we Shamans do."

This man, no doubt, belonged to the "good Shamans," [1] being "possessed by a mighty spirit from above." "It is no easy thing to become a real Shaman," he explained. In the north of Siberia the office of the Shaman is not hereditary, as is the case among their brethren in southern Siberia. The Shaman of the north must go through a personal crisis to be prepared to receive the "mighty spirit," which alone will enable him to fill his office. The way by which he becomes possessed of the spirit our Shaman friend explained to me in the following manner:—"Sometimes," he said, "it may occur that a young native happens to come too near the grave of a Shaman in the depths of the forest or on the tundra, and is 'seized' by the spirit of the buried Shaman, who is always hovering about his master's grave; or maybe 'the mighty spirit' comes over him while wandering alone in the wilderness—as was the

[1] The natives distinguish between "good" and "bad" Shamans, the latter only practising for the sake of profit.

case with the narrator—or while speeding along behind his reindeer over the tundra, the northern lights flaming over his head." Then the young man "is seized with a strange melancholy," which increases to "great anguish." He "trembles from inward terror" and finally falls into a state of ecstasy, "seeing what others do not see and hearing what others do not hear." This crisis may be repeated several times, until the youth finally "is delivered from the power of the lower spirits and becomes possessed by a higher and mightier spirit," by the power of which he will be able to give such proofs of "subduing the evil spirits" as shall give him the right of entry into the brotherhood of the Shamans.

But this is only the beginning, our Shaman friend explained. "The great trials will come when the young Shaman is called upon to drive out the evil spirits from the sick, reveal secret things, or foretell future events."

Let us take a typical case, the healing of an *emirjak*, *i.e.* a person suffering from a kind of severe hysterical disease which is very common among the natives of northern Siberia. In the yurta of the patient are gathered together his relatives and neighbours, sitting on the *nares* or low benches serving as bedsteads along the walls. A few burning embers spread a dim light from the fireplace in the midst of the yurta. All are sitting in silent expectation. To them enters the Shaman, silent and solemn, carrying the magic drum. His task commences with "the subduing of the lower spirits, which have their abode in

objects surrounding us." In summoning these spirits the Shaman imitates with wonderful cleverness the various sounds of nature and of animals. You hear the low whispering of the wind in the forest, its sighs and moans among the tops of the trees, the howling and roaring of the storm on the tundra, followed by a feeble tap of the drumstick, signifying that the spirits of the winds are now captured in the drum. After a short pause you hear the shriek of the owl, the bleating of the snipe, the curious laughing note of the ptarmigan, the growling of the bear, the howling of the wolf, etc., followed by a fresh beat of the drum. The "lower spirits" being thus captured, the Shaman now goes to work to conquer the "stronger spirits." To this end he puts on the "*volshebnaya odjeshda*," the magic kaftan, hung with numerous symbolical pieces of metal of different shapes and sizes, and taking hold of the drum, repeats some prayers and formulas of exorcism in an old language, seldom understood but by the oldest Shamans. Then the beat of the drum increases, until it culminates in loud claps of thunder, accompanied by the pattering and beating of rain and hail. At length the Shaman throws the drum away and begins dancing and jumping, uttering the while —half singing and half shrieking—various prayers and formulas of exorcism. By this time the congregation, who have hitherto been sitting awe-struck and silent, have become excited too, and now loudly join in the chanting and exorcisms, until together with the Shaman they fall into a swoon of ecstasy. During this ecstasy the Shaman is

"in a higher world, effecting the cure of the diseased man," or perhaps finding out that the patient is incurable.

In the Shamanistic religion the spirits of ancestors play a very prominent part as the connecting link between mankind and the upper or lower deities, aiding the Shamans to intercede with the good deities and to cheat or exorcise the evil spirits. With the exception of the highest divinity, [1] who is exalted above all influences, good or evil, and therefore cannot be moved either by sacrifices or prayers, all the Shamanistic deities share the weakness of other gods in being fond of praises and gifts of sacrifices. By these means, and by the aid of the spirits of ancestors, the Shamans move the beneficent gods to do their will and drive out the evil spirits which torment mankind.

Throughout the whole life of man, these divinities and spirits influence his destiny for good or evil. When a human being is to be brought into existence, a deity of the name of Bai-Ylgön notifies his son, Jajyk, of the event, ordering him to take measures accordingly. This divinity in his turn, on the intercession of the spirits of deceased men (the Shamanistic saints), leaves the matter in the hands of one of his servant deities, called Jajutschi, who fetches vital power out of the milk-white *sytak-köl* and brings the new human being into this world, accompanying it through life as its counsellor and protecting genius.

[1] The Shamanistic god, living "in the seventh heaven," is called Tangara among the Shamanists of southern Siberia; in northern Siberia he is called Ai-Toion.

A SHAMAN GRAVE.

In the meantime the prince of evil, the fearful Erlik Khan, ruling over the kingdom of darkness "in the seventh stratum below the surface of the earth," does not remain inactive. He sends out one of his servants, Körmoss, who tries to hinder the birth of the human being. If he does not succeed in this, he persecutes the "child of man" throughout life. Man is thus, from the cradle to the grave, accompanied both by an evil and a good genius. The good genius registers all his good deeds, and the evil genius his bad ones. When the man dies, the evil genius Körmoss carries his soul down to the throne of Erlik Khan to be judged. If the man has done more good than evil in his lifetime, Erlik Khan has no power over him, and he mounts upwards to higher regions. But if he has done more evil than good he is sent down to the Shamanistic hell, below the throne of Erlik Khan, where he is boiled in kettles with burning tar, until he is purified of his earthly sin, when he mounts upward little by little into the higher strata of the spirit world.

Our friend at Katanskoie told us that the Shamans on the Taimyr, besides smaller annual meetings, have a large conference every third year in some secluded place on the tundra, where the officials cannot reach them. At these meetings, not only are spiritual exercises held, but also consultations on the temporal affairs of the natives. Although Shamanism is strictly forbidden, and Russian missionaries have for many years been doing mission-work in northern Siberia, the fact remains that the great majority of the

natives on the Taimyr are as yet not even nominally Christians, and those that are supposed to belong to the orthodox Church are still, at heart, Shamanists. The missionaries, being desirous to report as many converts as possible to the Holy Synod, give vodka, tobacco, etc. to those natives that consent to be baptised. The consequence is that many are baptised several times over in order to get these presents.

The Samoyedes on the Taimyr are most faithful adherents to the religion of their ancestors, and the great majority of them are not, either by threats or gifts, persuaded to be baptised. A somewhat rough people, they answer the admonitions of the missionary in their language, whose accents often remind the listener of the grunting of pigs and the growling of bears: "Ugh! Ugh! Be baptised? And why? The baptised people are the worst rascals on the whole Taimyr? Ugh! Ugh! But give me a *vedro* of vodka, and I will think about the matter. Ugh! ha-ha-ha!"

This answer, literally translated by myself from the diary of a missionary, contains only too much truth. The baptised natives are, as a rule, the least reliable people, and by breaking up the old tribal organisations of the natives, grown out of the experience of thousands of years and working very well in their way, the kind of missionary work carried on in these regions often does more harm than good. The genuine pagans of northern Siberia are, as a rule, much more real Christians in their lives than "the baptised people". This is some-

times admitted even by orthodox people themselves. Thus a Russian bishop has given the following significant story in an official ecclesiastical paper.

"Among the natives on the Taimyr some had adopted the orthodox faith and been baptised in order to get presents in the shape of vodka and tobacco. Others, on the other hand, and among them an old Shaman, had stuck to their pagan views. So it happened one winter that a certain bishop and a priest were to travel to the Taimyr. The old heathen Shaman drove the bishop, and the baptised natives the priest. A terrible storm arose, the travellers lost sight of one another, and the reindeer got loose and ran away. The old Shaman wrapped the bishop in reindeer skins, gave him a reindeer-tongue to eat, and disappeared. The bishop, believing himself doomed to a horrible death on the tundra, read his prayers and prepared for his end. But on the following day the Shaman returned with reindeer and food, and fetched the bishop to the next camp. The priest, on the other hand, had been left by the baptised natives to perish."

Thus the story of the good Samaritan holds good even on the tundra to-day.

CHAPTER XX.

ACROSS THE TAIMYR PENINSULA.

We leave the Katanga—Our Winter Dress—Fatigues of Sledge Travelling—A Tungus Family—Across an Unknown Land—The Nosovaya Tundra—An Unexpected Forest—A Dolgan Deputation—Geographical Distribution of the Nomad Races—We Reach the Yenisei.

KNOWING that there were winter yurtas on the forest-line all the way between Katangskoie and the Yenisei, we had looked forward to this part of our journey as an easy affair. In this, however, we were sadly disappointed. The natives had not as yet come back from the tundra to these yurtas, whither they return "when the sun disappears," *i.e.* in the middle of November.

The natives told us that it would be very difficult to find the camps on the immense Taimyr, because the people were constantly moving about with their herds of reindeer, and they therefore advised us to stay at Katangskoie until they had got back to the forest-line, saying it would be a very risky affair to try without their aid to cross the tundra, where people had often perished in the snowstorms.

Being anxious, however, to get over this part of our journey before these dreaded November blizzards came upon us, we decided to make the attempt, and accordingly started

from Katangskoie on the arrival of the people and reindeer we had sent for.

It would be tempting to reproduce the contents of my diary of our adventurous journey over the Taimyr tundra, but I fear that the details might tire the reader and swell this volume too much, and must accordingly limit myself to a general description. Our winter costumes consisted of the following garments:—stockings made of the skins of reindeer calves, with the hair turned inward; high boots made of the skins of the legs of the reindeer, and very roomy, so as to afford plenty of space for hay, with which they were well stuffed; drawers, under-clothes, trousers and waistcoat of heavy woollen cloth; an inner coat of the skins of reindeer calves, and a large overcoat of wild reindeer-skin. The coats were made in the native fashion, and were put on over the head like shirts; on the head we wore a large hood, covering the whole face, leaving an opening only for the eyes; while our hands were protected by large gloves of reindeer-skin. We had no sleeping bags, but used only pelts and reindeer-skins as covering for our beds at night.

We had been advised to procure covered sledges, like the one I have described in which the Polish nobleman lived,—a kind that is always used by merchants and officials when travelling on the tundra, but I preferred to use the lighter open sledges like the natives.

Thus equipped, we did not suffer so very much from the intense cold, in spite of its touching 62° below zero,

and of there being almost always more or less wind on the tundra. It is true that when we had to sleep in the open air we shivered with cold when we awoke, but we never took cold, thanks to the pure air.

Travelling more or less night and day over these vast wastes of snow for weeks together is a constant strain both on the muscles and nerves, so that with a monotonous diet of frozen fish, reindeer-meat, and mouldy rye-bread, it becomes excessively fatiguing in the long run. But, on the other hand, the night-travel behind good reindeer, beneath the flaming northern lights, and with the indescribable spell of the far north upon one, affords a unique delight unknown to civilised life; and even the terrible storms, the chance of wolves, and the various dangers of these far-off lands are not without a certain peculiar attractiveness—especially when they become a matter of retrospection. Then, again, there is the pleasure of coming in contact here and there with genuine good heathens, undefiled by civilisation, honest and excellent people, rendering you all the services they can as a matter of honour and duty, never bargaining, and expecting as a matter of course that you will treat them in the same way.

On the Taimyr tundra, however, as we came further and further westward, we more and more found that the influence of so-called "civilisation" had affected the natives. We were once more in a land where we had to bargain beforehand with the people; not that this, however, caused us any special difficulty, for our drivers, as we found out,

reported from place to place that we paid well for their services. After travelling some 50 days over the tundras, I knew by heart the stereotyped Yakut phrases used in this bargaining. For the use of those who may feel tempted to make a holiday trip in winter-time to northern Siberia, I give at the end of this volume a few of the most typical phrases—a "Manual of Conversation" with which it is possible to get along all the way from the lower Yenisei to the land of the Tschuktchis, a little trip of some 3500 miles.

From Katangskoie we took a south-westerly direction, which we followed for a distance of 75 miles. The temperature kept between 22° and 40° below zero, and a north-westerly wind was almost constantly blowing. At one camp we found an interesting Tungus family, consisting of an 80-years-old widow with five sons. Both the widow and her sons were unsophisticated heathens, who did not, as many Yakut Shamanists do when travellers come, make the sign of the Cross. She wondered why we did not cross ourselves, and believing that we too were some kind of heathens, she commenced to tell us about her experiences in life. She related that she had lost her husband long ago, and had all the time of her widowhood been keeping her sons and herds of reindeer as far as possible from all contact with "the baptised people" (the merchants and the priests). In this she had succeeded so well, that her healthy-looking sons, of whom three were married, knew the taste neither of tobacco nor vodka.

Her sons told us that at the next two camps were "bad people", and that we should have great difficulty in getting reindeer and people for continuing our journey. Although it was difficult for them to be away from their herds, they eventually promised to transport our party to some place where we should find good people and reindeer. We found their statements with regard to the "bad people" to be well founded. At the camps spoken of, where we had to spend the night, there was unspeakable poverty and dirt.

Having completed our 75 miles on a south-westerly course, we turned once more north, and zigzagged from camp to camp over an undulating tundra, intersected by labyrinths of crevasses and ravines, which very much hindered our progress. Passing over the lake of Boganida, we came to the Nosovaya tundra, in crossing which our course lay in a more or less westerly direction, following the water-divide between the Katanga to the south-east, the Taimyr river to the north, and the Piasina to the west, and keeping about 125 miles north of the forest-line as marked on the maps. With the exception perhaps of some stray merchant's agent, no civilised people have ever travelled over this part of the tundra, at all events not since the days of Middendorff. His expedition, however, went from the Yenisei to the Taimyr Lake, where he lost his boat and narrowly escaped with his life. Merchants, officials, and other travellers follow a more southerly route, through the forest-region.

This Nosovaya tundra, the highest tundra on the Taimyr,

A FOREST IN THE TAIMYR DISTRICT.

is flat, and abounds in marshes and lakes, making travelling easy in good weather. In snowstorms, of which we had some fair specimens, the crossing of it is a somewhat risky affair.

At one place near a lake we found, to our great surprise, a thin forest of small and stunted larch-trees, forming an island in this boundless frozen "sea", as the natives in their picturesque language call the tundra. In this same lake-region we came upon a number of very poor native families of various races, occupying themselves with fishing and trapping foxes. A little later we arrived at the camp of a hospitable Tungus chief, who treated us to some splendid frozen fish, which he had caught in the Taimyr river. He had met with several Samoyedes, "a people very communicative and fond of talking", but he had not heard of the discovery of any trace of Andrée's balloon or its occupants.

The report that we were "ambassadors of the Great White Sun" seems to have preceded us everywhere in our travels in this part of the world, and at one of our camps, as on a previous occasion to which I have alluded, we were waited upon by a formal deputation, headed by a Dolgan chief, complaining bitterly of the way they were being fleeced and bullied by the merchants, especially by a certain Sotnikoff, who had on one occasion beaten the eyes out of a native, because he had sold a fox-skin to another merchant, while other wretched people had been treated in a similarly barbarous way. On two other occa-

sions formal complaints of a like nature were made to us by deputations, and there is no doubt, especially from what I afterwards learnt from thoroughly reliable sources, that these poor natives are infamously treated by some of the merchants, and are often reduced to a state of misery and famine, which at times has led to cannibalism, as indeed has been officially proved—for example, among the Samoyedes and the Ostiaks on the lower Yenisei, and the Dolgans and other natives in the Taimyr region.

I could only promise these unfortunate people to try to lay their case before some of the Russian authorities and the general public. I also spoke to their Governor on the subject as well as to a prominent person in St. Petersburg, a personal friend of the Tsar, and other persons in authority. [1] There is no doubt that these natives, now fast dying out, will soon belong only to history, if radical and speedy reforms are not undertaken to prevent it.

During our passage over the immense Taimyr peninsula between the Katanga and the river Piasina, we gathered the following information as to the annual wanderings of the natives, who, with their herds of reindeer, keep within the limits of certain districts. Dolgans and Yakuts nomadise on the river Gorbita, which falls into the Taimyr, and on the last-named river as far as the mouth of its tributary, the Kerika; Samoyedes monopolise the Logatta, another tributary of the Taimyr; and Dolgans the country north of

[1] I have since been informed that the above-mentioned Sotnikoff, the most ruffianly tormentor of the natives, has been banished to Yakutsk.

its mouth. In the neighbourhood of the Taimyr river, north of the lake of that name, where there is plenty of splendid fishing, tribes of Tunguses and Samoyedes fish and trap foxes; while east of the lake, towards Balakna and Katanga Bay, the country is mainly occupied by Dolgans, who hunt the wild reindeer and gather mammoth-tusks. On the Piasina and in the region east of it towards the Taimyr

SAMOYEDES NEAR THE PIASINA.

Lake, Dolgans and Samoyedes wander, reaching northwards to the Arctic sea. Although the Samoyedes spend the summer north of Lake Taimyr, they nowadays never go as far north as the Arctic Ocean.

During our journey from the lake of Piasina to the Yenisei, a distance of about 125 miles, we crossed the Norilsky mountains and met with unpleasantly stormy

weather. We finally reached Dudinskoie or Dudinka on the lower Yenisei, after having spent 51 days on the journey from the mouth of the Lena, a total distance of about 1860 miles. [1] There now remained some 1300 miles of travel up the Yenisei before we regained the railroad at Krasnoyarsk.

[1] The distances actually travelled are here spoken of, not those in a straight line between the places.

CHAPTER XXI.

UP THE YENISEI.

No News from Civilisation—We bid Adieu to Torgersen—Sledging up the Yenisei—Torosses—The Taiga once more—Turukansk—The Ostiak—"A Big Minister"—Society in Turukansk—Yeniseisk—Home.

On our arrival at Dudinskoie we learned, to our surprise, that neither the expected trading steamers nor the Russian expedition to Taimyr had visited the mouth of the Yenisei during the summer. Only one English steamer had arrived. We had hoped to receive comparatively fresh news of the outer world in this place, as there was said to be a mail between Dudinskoie and Yeneseisk, but in this too we were disappointed. Among the few inhabitants of the settlement —which consisted of some merchants, a few exiled stundists etc., two priests, and a civil officer—there was not one single newspaper to be found, and they did not know more than we did about the events which had taken place in the civilised world during the previous three months. We were, it is true, told "news" about Andrée, but this "news" wore the wrinkles of old age. Thus, for instance, it was reported that Andrée had sent a carrier-pigeon "from the North Pole" with the information that he and his companions

were all right, and were on their way homewards. This carrier-pigeon, however, had fallen a victim to ignorant people, who had killed it. This Siberian edition of the message which Andrée's carrier-pigeon brought from the "Eagle" two days after its start, seemed to be firmly believed in by these good people, although a circular containing the true message had been sent even to Dudinskoie by the Russian government.

At this hospitable little place we stayed four days, and here we parted with our friend and interpreter, Mr. Torgersen, who started on his lonely journey back to Bulun on the lower Lena. All the way to Dudinskoie the natives spoke the Yakut language. On the Yenisei, the natives and the rest of the population all speaking Russian, we stood in no need of an interpreter.

From Dudinskoie up river to Turukansk, which is situated near the Arctic circle, the distance is about 430 miles, and this we had to travel by reindeer-sledge. This part of our journey, contrary to expectation, proved very difficult on account of *torosses*, snowstorms, and water collected underneath the deep snow. In addition to these drawbacks the poor people at the stations had few and weak reindeer, often kept several miles from the stations, thus causing much delay. To this was added some unpleasant experiences of the worst class of criminals exiled to these distant regions; men who, in many cases, have both morally and physically ruined the people. In one place, where the host and the hostess were away, having left an old

exiled criminal, together with a number of other criminals, alone with the children, we found it advisable to have the candle burning all night, with the revolver handy, closely watching the rascals, who tried several times to get into our room with the evident design of robbing us.

On our way we had to sift a number of carrier-pigeon stories, which all resolved themselves, as we expected, into more or less clumsy fiction.

In certain places travelling on the river was decidedly dangerous on account of the quantity of water which had become dammed up by the torosses. Twice the animals went through the ice into the water, in a temperature of some 20° below zero, in a blinding storm, and we narrowly escaped drowning. Often, too, the sledges came to grief among the torosses, which caused us much trouble and delay. When some accident happened, the drivers would cry out: "*Propal! Propal!*" a word very common among Siberians, meaning: "Lost! Lost!" and at the sound of this word of ill-omen I knew there was trouble in store.

There was little in our surroundings to compensate us for the irksomeness of our journey. The endless monotony of the torosses on the river, the low shores on each side of us crowned by stunted trees, and a "station" with poor dwellings and miserable people at distances of from 12 to 30 miles apart, combined to make it wearisome to a degree. For the last thirty miles north of Turukansk we travelled through the taiga, which, in spite of the deep snow and the narrowness of the path cut through the

virgin forest, afforded a very pleasant change. Covered with snow, the taiga stood solemn and quiet, the silence broken only by the sound of the bells on the necks of the reindeer and the light friction of the sledge against the soft snow.

No sign of life, except the tracks of wild animals, is to be seen. Here we come upon the trail of a hare, pursued, as is evident by the tracks that soon become mingled with it, by a fox; a little further on two foxes have been walking quietly side by side. I look around me on these traces of social life in the taiga, I look upwards on the grey sky; my eyelids become heavy, and close. The impressions of present sights and sounds become merged together in my thoughts, and from them arise new combinations of images—of the horse-bells of my native land, of Christmas-trees, of joyous laughter—when again the horrible word: "*Propal! Propal!*" reverberates through the forest, startling me out of my half-waking dream, and the next moment I am sailing through the air with my sledge, to land on the surface of a little ice-bound stream with a crash!

Late in the evening we arrived at Turukansk in a temperature of — 40° Fahr., and got lodging at the house of the acting chief of police, where we slept on the floor.

This most northern "city" of Siberia was founded by official command in 1672. It has been the central point of commercial and official connection with the natives over an immense region, but has long ago lost its import-

TURUKANSK.

ance. It is situated in a marshy and unhealthy region, and is soon to be moved to the village of Monastyrskaya, 20 miles further to the south.

A Russian author has given an interesting description of this "city" in a Russian periodical, from which I make the following quotation:—

"It might be a matter of controversy," says he, "whether a small place with 22 little wooden huts really constitutes a city; but I will not only state the fact that it is really a city, but will even call it a capital, for it is the administrative, ecclesiastical, and economic centre of a country as large as France, and rules over various peoples, such as Ostiaks, Yuraks, Dolgans, and Tunguses. Moreover, it has everything that a city requires to justify its right to the title. Here is the highest official of the whole region—I do not know what to call him: king or president—who within the town bears the humble title of local chief of police, and who every year makes a round through his tundra-kingdom in order to collect the taxes and uphold the prestige of the Government. Here also is a postmaster, who regularly once a month, excepting for two or three months in spring-time and in autumn, when all communication with the rest of the world is cut off, forwards information to the local officials. Here, too, is a missionary priest, who, like the chief of police, makes a trip over the tundra once a year, to educate the savage natives in the orthodox faith, baptising and marrying those whom the tundra during the past year has been able to give birth to or bring

together in matrimony, and burying those that have perished. Here, moreover, is a doctor, a church, and a prison.

"The chief of police is a jolly fellow, who likes to joke with arriving travellers. When they ask him where to get lodging, he replies curtly: 'In the prison!' If the reply is taken seriously, and the visitor looks astonished at him, he replies, laughing: 'I was only joking. There is no hotel in the city, and travellers lodge in the prison, which is seldom used for other purposes. I have for six years been chief of police here, and there has been only one case, when a famishing native ate up his sister—you may have read about it in the newspapers?—and I sent him alive to the capital of the province.'

"The central figure of life in the city, for the sake of whom indeed the very city itself with all its ruling authorities exists, is the Ostiak. But the people of the city have of late become dissatisfied with the Ostiak.

"'What times we now live in, *Barin!*' complains old Madame Kopylicha, who has a small store of colonial goods in the city, and secretly trades in intoxicating liquors. 'Why, it is no longer possible to live on the Ostiak—such a cunning animal the savage has become, you can't conceive! For instance, there comes an Ostiak and says he, "Give me a pound of tea, little mother, and I will give thee this white fox-skin." Well, I weigh out three-quarters of a pound of tea to him, and say, "Here thou hast a pound;" and he weighs it in his hand and says: "No, little mother, this is not a pound." And—would you be-

lieve it!—the wretch goes to my neighbour and weighs it! In former years I gave him half-a-pound and said: "There thou hast thy pound," and he believed... What a cunning beast he has become!'

"'Yes, these wretched people have become altogether spoilt!' declares the chief of police in an authoritative tone. If he happens to be in a happy after-dinner mood, then he will expatiate on the virtues of the formerly good-hearted Ostiak.

"'In the good old times,' he will tell you, 'things were arranged in a simple way. Now, for instance, my predecessor, Stepan Flegantovich—you perhaps know him—*he* used to do a good bit of business here! He would announce to the Ostiak chiefs and their people that an order from St. Petersburg had arrived to collect skins of sables for a fur-coat for the Minister—the great Minister who rules over the whole Russian tundra.

"'Well, the Ostiaks bring skins of sables one year, two years, as much as they are able to'—the chief of police becomes livelier—'for this fur-coat of the Minister!' Then finally the Ostiaks come to Stepan and say:—

"'"We have now brought skins of sables sufficient not only for a fur-coat, but for a sleigh-cover, gloves, and cap."

"'"What do you mean?" roars Stepan. "Do you believe, you villains, that the Minister is such a miserable worm as you? Why, *such* a big one is he!"—pointing to the church steeple. And the Ostiak chiefs look at one another and return home. And after six months they returned again

with still more sables, and finally there was enough for the ministerial fur-coat... That is the way things were done in those days; but now it is impossible to make anything out of the Ostiak!'

"But after all the Ostiak is not even now 'such a villain' and 'such a cunning beast' as the chief of the police and Madame Kopylicha pretend. Even now the Ostiak procures —and that on any order from the minister—enough sables not only for the fur-coat and cap of the chief of police, but also for those of his wife, his children, his relations and his friends. The Ostiak gives sables to the missionary priest, and to the merchant, who rules as an autocrat over the tundra."

We spent three days in Turukansk. The long winter-night had set in, and the "society" of the place had commenced the winter season, having their parties by turn in different houses almost every night, drinking vodka and playing cards—both men and women—until 3 o'clock in the morning. One morning one of the ladies said to me, her face beaming, that she had won 7 roubles during the night.

While the *haute société* were drinking and playing one night, I slipped off to the political exiles—a doctor of philosophy, and a few working-men, who had been exiled on account of their socialistic views. The doctor lived in a small hut, which he heated in the day-time with a miserable stove; but in the night the temperature would sink to 14° Fahr., and the poor man suffered much from

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rheumatism. One of the exiled working-men had his young wife and baby with him. Another of the exiles kept aloof from all company, and showed signs of insanity, to which malady these unhappy people often fall victims.

A few miles outside the city were colonies of exiled sectarians, such as Stundists, Duchobortsi, Skoptsi, and others.

From Turukansk to Krasnoyarsk, a distance of about 870 miles, we travelled with horses. The snowstorms continued, and the torosses on the river together with dammed up masses of water made the journey very difficult and tedious.

On reaching the mouth of the Podkamennaya Tunguska, where the gigantic river has made its way through a chain of mountains, the scenery becomes less monotonous, and at certain places is even grand. The trees are majestic, and the numerous islands in the river are highly picturesque. The villages now grow more and more in size, and part of the population seems to be well off.

On our arrival in Yeniseisk we learned, to our regret, that no news of Andrée had been received. I had some thought of spending the rest of the winter in this town, and making an expedition in the spring to the western part of the Taimyr peninsula, but on our arrival at Krasnoyarsk I received news from home which made it necessary for me to give up this plan. Here I also learned that the third member of our expedition, our botanist Mr. Nilson, with whom we parted on the lower Lena, had been

detained for several weeks in the city of Yakutsk, having failed to catch the last steamer from that place.

On our way home I had to investigate the truth of the last report of the Andrée expedition which came to my knowledge in Siberia—namely, the story of "a letter from Andrée," said to have been found in a bottle near Slatoust. It proved, like most of its predecessors, to be only a hoax. The story of Ljàlin was started after my return home. It made a good deal of fuss, and much money was spent in telegrams and special investigations on the spot, although it was evident from the reports of reliable persons in Siberia that the story was only an invention, like so many others.

After having spent a few days at Yasnaya Polyana, the estate of Count Leo Tolstoy, whither I was invited by one of the Count's sons—a visit of which I entertain the most pleasant memories—we arrived in Stockholm at the end of the year 1898, having travelled in all about 15,500 miles since we left that capital a little more than eight months before.

The results of our search after Andrée were only negative, it is true, but we would not at the time consider this in any way affected the hope we cherished of the return of our courageous countrymen. Unfortunately, this hope has since diminished.

However, we may now, I believe, take it for granted that Andrée and his companions did not land on the

Siberian coast east of the peninsula of Taimyr; while it is equally improbable that they reached the most northern parts of this peninsula. Moreover, in the latter case, if Andrée and his companions still had their rifles and ammunition, they should have been able to preserve their lives until they reached some native camp, for northern Taimyr abounds in game. If, on the other hand, the expedition has perished somewhere on the northern coast of Siberia, it is certainly of advantage that we should have been able to put ourselves in contact with natives over an immense extent of this country and by promises of reward to stimulate them to be on the look-out for any kind of trace of our unfortunate fellow-countrymen.

And, though our expedition resulted, in one sense, in failure, we have at least tried to do our best to fulfil what was considered to be a national duty.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE EXILE SYSTEM.

The Ukase of Abolition—Early History of the Exile System—An optimistic View—The "Cooking" of Official Documents—The Early Reformers—Statistics—An Unacknowledged Corvée—The Brodyagi—Cannibalism—Increase of Crime—Demoralisation of the Authorities.

REGULARLY every year during the last decade the impending abolition of the exile system has been announced through the Russian press, and last year an imperial ukase was issued decreeing that deportation to Siberia shall in future be replaced by imprisonment after the pattern of western Europe. The growing discontent among the Siberians has thus been soothed down by this imperial promise to abolish the hated system. But, as a matter of fact, after the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the system became clearly no longer possible.

It requires, however, something more than press-notices and ukases to create a penal system with necessary institutions capable of receiving the stream of real criminals or innocent victims of Russian justice—amounting to some 20,000 every year—which is flowing into Siberia, not to speak of the thousands which are being exiled to other distant parts of the immense empire, such as Trans-Caucasia,

Archangel, the Murman Coast, etc. It will therefore no doubt be long yet before the ukases will be carried into effect.

At any rate, it will be of interest, on the eve of a new century and the opening up of Siberia, to take a short glance at this Siberian exile system, about which so many strange ideas seem even to this day to prevail.

Deportation to Siberia began at the close of the 16th century—the murderers of the Tsarevitch Demetrius were, in the year 1593, probably the first criminals exiled to Siberia. At first it was practised only exceptionally, but soon it became a general method of punishment. Before 1800 there are no reliable statistics as to the exiles, and only during the last few decades has a regular account been kept of the number of people who have crossed the border. According to an official report, 2035 were sent to Siberia in 1807, but in the year 1823, the annual number had grown to 6667. During the period from 1824 to 1827 it averaged 11,000, and from 1870 up to the present time about 20,000.

For a long time there was great enthusiasm in Russian circles about the supposed blessings of the exile system. By this method, it was said, the mother-country gets rid of dangerous persons, who, under the influence of new surroundings in a new country, should eventually become most useful in the cultivation and development of the rich but untilled soil of Siberia. Nothing could be more simple and at the same time more satisfactory! They had no other facts, it is true, to rest their hopeful theory on than

the accounts of the "Prikas" (the Bureau of Deportation) as to the number of exiles who had crossed the border into this promised land. But what more was needed to construe brilliant results? It was shown that up to 1850 about half-a-million of exiles—of more or less dangerous subjects in other words—had been expatriated. According to the laws of natural increase, the system would thus have added more than a million to the population of Siberia—truly a great and important reinforcement for so thinly peopled a country!

In Russia it was naively believed that the exiles on the other side of the Urals were all living in the places whither they had been sent, cultivating the soil, building homes, increasing and multiplying, and generally behaving themselves in a most satisfactory and model fashion. If the subject were not so hopelessly melancholy, the rose-coloured effusions published in Moscow and St. Petersburg in early days about the great blessings and success of this ingenious system—which satisfied alike the criminalists, the representatives of the reform-principle, and the humanitarians—would form amusing reading. Such highly laudatory opinions from such differing and irreconcilable sources ought, it is true, to have aroused suspicion in the minds of thinking people, but on the contrary, they contributed to strengthen the faith in the infallibility of the system. Now and then a voice crying in the wilderness of the awful misery prevailing reached the ears of the authorities, but these voices were soon silenced for ever, or overpowered by the pan-

egyrics emanating from the officials in Siberia. Thus, not only Russia, but the learned of Europe were astounded at the phenomenal longevity among the exiles: in their credulity they did not suspect that the almost patriarchally long lives recorded existed only in the "cooked" official lists of the Siberian authorities, who prolonged the lives of thousands of exiles for tens of years after their death or disappearance, in order to put the money received from the government for their support into their own pockets!

Now and again complaints were made of the enormous expenses of the system, but even these were disproved by the fictitious reports issued by the Siberian officials, who sent in elaborate statements of expenses incurred in the construction of roads, bridges, prisons, etc., which it is needless to say were never built. It was not until such men as Dostoievsky, Lvov, Savalichin, Maximov, Rovinsky, Yadrintseff and others had drawn aside the veil, that light began to spread on the real facts of the exile system and the untold misery of the victims of it. By and by the imperative necessity of radical reforms was recognised.

But first of all it was necessary to know what and how to reform. Unfortunately, trustworthy accounts and figures were wanting. The reformers were thus compelled to make thorough statistical researches for themselves. But this gigantic task, which has been going on up to this day, has been one of almost insuperable difficulty, because the primary accounts have either been wanting or worthless. The only reliable data concerning the exiles relate to the

number passing the borders of Siberia. Even the figures obtained by the general census have in many cases proved untrustworthy, on account of the great difficulty experienced in getting satisfactory returns in the distant parts of the country.

Let us glance for a moment at a few of the facts obtained by recent investigations. According to these, the entire number of prisoners sent to Siberia from the beginning of the exile system until now amounts, in round numbers, to one million—the relatives of prisoners who have accompanied them into exile included. Even if great allowances be made, this million ought to have increased somewhat, or the number ought at least to have been kept up. But what are the facts?

The general director of prisons, A. P. Salomon, having spent several months in Siberia investigating the system, has recently published a report, from which I may quote the following figures. According to his estimate, the number of exiles and their relatives living at the present moment in Siberia amounts, in round figures, to some 300,000, of whom about 100,000 are "*brodyagi*" (runaway prisoners), 100,000 "proletarians," 70,000 labourers without land, 30,000 settled labourers, and "only 4500 giving reason for hoping that they will become assimilated with the older population." These figures speak for themselves as to the result of the exile system through its three centuries of existence. A detailed description of the conditions which have brought them about need not be given

here. It would involve not merely a history of the exile system, but a history of Russian civilisation itself.

The truth is that the exile system has worked in a vicious circle, spreading its curse, directly and indirectly, through every department of life, and to all classes of people—the

EXILES ON THE LENA.

exiles themselves, the people with whom they live, and the authorities who have charge of them

The relations between the Russian Siberians proper and the "*varnaks*",[1] as the exiles are called, are anything

[1] The word "*Varnak*" is derived from the Russian initials *V. R. N. K.*, denoting the words: "*Vor, razboinyik, nakazanny knutom*" (= thief, robber, punished with the knout), and with these initials the exiles were formerly branded.

but friendly. The animosity of the former against the exiles (from which the politicals and the sectarians must of course be excepted in this connection) is founded, not only on the natural antipathy to criminals which is common everywhere, but on the heavy burdens which this system lays on the shoulders of the real inhabitants of the land. Besides the indirect losses to the Siberian population caused by the 100,000 *brodyagi*, who live by begging and stealing; the expensive police-establishments in the villages which these bands of loafers and robbers necessitate; and the numerous sick and poor exiles, which the communities have to support; [1] the Siberian peasants are compelled to perform an immense amount of unpaid work in the shape of transport, escorting prisoners, hunting up and watching runaway prisoners, paying the arrears of taxes of the exile-colonists, etc. In cities the cost of maintaining the prisons puts a heavy burden on the inhabitants.

In their turn the Siberians try as much as possible to exploit the exiles, and in other ways to make up for their losses. Life is thus made insupportable even to the better classes of the exiles, who are trying to make a living by honest work. The exiles are really and in fact outside the protection of the law. They have often to do manual labour for nothing—"varnak-wages" are a byword, meaning starvation-wages—their hay, their building-material and cattle

[1] The sum of 19 roubles 13 kopeks *per annum* provided by the government for the support of each invalid exile is altogether insufficient.

are sometimes taken from them, and it is useless going to law over the matter—the exile will never obtain justice. He is "only a varnak!"

This state of things together with the nameless misery existing in the transport-prisons has contributed to swell the stream of runaway prisoners. These "unhappy ones," as they are called, will rather risk being shot in a dash for liberty than stay under insupportable conditions. Deprived as they often are during the greater part of their lives of every decent human influence, these "*brodyagi*" finally lose all trace of human feelings, and are capable not only of killing their fellow-man in cold blood in order to rob him, but also, as sometimes happens, of killing and eating one another! Such are the fruits produced by the exile system on the exiles themselves!

It is but natural that the moral infection should spread to the population at large, who, alike from motives of self-defence or hatred, will hunt and kill the "*brodyagi*" just as they would a wild beast.

The large number of crimes which occur in Siberia has already been pointed out in an earlier portion of this volume. A few more facts may not unfittingly be added in this connection. From the official statistics it appears that in many places more than half the number of crimes are committed by exiles, though their number is only about 6 per cent of the entire population. From the local criminal statistics it further appears that in Siberia the number of crimes is far greater than those occurring in all other

parts of the Russian empire; that the worst crimes, such as murder, occupy the first place on the list; that coining, a speciality introduced by the runaway prisoners, has spread immensely among the Siberian peasantry, the labouring classes, and others; and that the increase of crime is far in advance of the increase of the population, and is accelerating from year to year at a frightful rate.

Not only is crime in Siberia distinguished by its frequent occurrence, but also by its shockingly cynical character. Illustrations of this it is unnecessary to give here, but it is an undoubted fact that the moral sensibilities of the people at large have become so blunted that hardly more attention is paid to a shocking murder than to the killing of a calf. The people have become so used to crimes that they do not pay much attention to them. Only now and then are complaints made of the lack of vigilance on the part of the police. In the city of Tomsk complaints of this kind once led to an incident which is characteristic of the Russian *régime* and of Siberian life generally. The *Duma* or city council of Tomsk formally requested the police-authorities, on account of the growing number of thefts, robberies, and murders within the city, to increase their vigilance and look after the night watchmen. The police-authorities, considering this as an insult to themselves, summoned the city council *in corpore* before the police-court. The following figures, however, will show that the city council had good reason for their action. According to the "Police Gazette," there had occurred in the city of

Tomsk at the time of which I speak, from July 1st to October 7th, no less than 30 cases of murder and robbery, and during another period of three months 58 crimes of the same kind had been committed!

I have already alluded to the spread of demoralisation in Siberia caused by the exile system. Another feature of this is the existence of organised bands of thieves and robbers under the direction of head-men. Thus there are special organisations for coining, stealing, and robbing. Sometimes the police themselves have been found to have a hand in the matter. The *brodyagi* are employed by these organisations, and receive part of the booty as wages for their work. Thus security to life and property becomes so small that merchants hardly dare to visit certain regions without an armed escort. How can commercial progress and industry thrive under such conditions?

The general state of barbarism and brutality which reigns in consequence of the exile system has also extended to the authorities, which, after all, is only what might be expected. One instance of this I may here quote on the authority of Yadrintseff. The director of the imperial gold mines at Karâ, one Demidoff, in order to elicit the details of a case of murder, once tortured the wife of the murderer, who had voluntarily accompanied her husband into exile, and on whom the director therefore had no right to inflict any kind of punishment. Then he also tortured the daughter of the murderer, a child of 11 years old. Pinioned and suspended in the air, the poor little girl was flogged from

head to foot. The child, having received a large number of lashes, asked for something to drink, when they offered her some salted salmon instead! She would have been flogged still more, if the jailer had not refused to continue his inhuman task.

Such are some of the features of the exile system, the intended abolition of which has finally been announced by imperial ukase.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILROAD AND MARITIME COMMUNICATION WITH NORTHERN SIBERIA.

Raison d'être of the Railway—Its Uselessness for the Transport of Cereals—The Perm-Archangel Line—Price of Wheat on the Yenisei—The great Waterways of Siberia—Maritime Communication—Capt. Wiggins and the Yenisei Trade—The Difficulties in the Way—The Policy of the Closed Door—The best Ice-breaker.

THE Trans-Siberian Railway will no doubt exert great influence both politically, economically, and culturally upon Siberia and its inhabitants: it will indeed create a new era in the history of the country.

Military and political reasons were probably the strongest motives in planning and constructing the line, and there is no doubt that this first railroad between the Baltic and the Pacific, between Europe and the populous countries of the far East—will be of the greatest importance in this respect. It is not my intention to discuss the political significance of this great undertaking, but it is very evident that the development of Siberia and the increase of its population must enter into the plan of the extension of Russian dominion in the far East, because a populous and strong Siberia will be one of the most important factors in the struggle with other Powers for supremacy in the East.

The reasons why Siberia has remained up to the present in a state of semi-barbarism are many. One of them is no doubt her lack of suitable communication with the civilised world. That the new railroad alone will not be able to fill this need is evident to all who have any personal knowledge of the country. Long before the line was seriously planned, Baron Nordenskjöld pointed out this fact in his well-known "Voyage of the Vega."

"Many," he says, "may believe that the present want of suitable communications for commerce will be filled by building a railroad through Russia and southern Siberia. But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, maritime communication is a necessary condition to make such a railroad pay; because it will be impossible to export the products of agriculture and of forests by rail over the distance of from 3000 to 5000 kilometres, which separates the fertile regions of the Ob—Irtisch river-systems from the nearest port in Europe."

"It will not pay to transport cereal products by the railroad over a distance of 3000 versts," says Tschukmallin, [1] "because this will cost about 50 kopeks a pood, i.e. 300 per cent of the price of rye and 170 per cent of the price of wheat at the places where they are grown. The freight is a very heavy burden even on other more valuable products. For the exportation of cereals, which are the principal products of Siberia, it is therefore absolutely

[1] "*Sibirskaja Zchisn.*" 1898. No. 255.

MAP OF THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

necessary to bring about cheaper means of communication than the railroad, if it is really intended to develop the agriculture of Siberia."

Yadrintseff holds a similar opinion. "One must be a very great optimist," he thinks, "to believe that the Trans-Siberian Railway will remove all the great difficulties which are caused by the immense distances."

Another author considers that "The direct influence of the railway will only extend over a belt of some 250 miles along the line (120 miles or so on either side); but the extension of Siberia from north to south amounts to thousands of miles; and the railway does not run through the central parts, but on the southern limits of Siberia."

In order to avoid flooding the market of European Russia with cheap Siberian cereals, a meeting of Siberian and Russian merchants petitioned the government in 1890 to connect Perm and Archangel by railroad, and it was calculated that the freight on such a railroad from the upper Ob to Archangel would amount to 40 kopeks a pood. [1] But later and more careful calculations have demonstrated that the freight would amount to from 70 kopeks to one rouble, or say roughly twice as much, so that it would prove impossible to export agricultural products even on that line, which, it must be remembered, would touch only a part of western Siberia.

In a word, railroad communication alone will not make

[1] About 1s. 7d. per cwt.

exportation of cereals and other cheap products from Siberia possible. Only manufactured products could be profitably exported by this means. But the development of Siberian industries under present circumstances is hindered by the necessity of procuring machines and tools from abroad, which makes them so enormously expensive that only a few capitalists can afford to buy them. If to this be added the ignorance of the people (who are quite unfit to handle modern machines) the ubiquitous monopolism, and the Asiatic *régime* in general, it is evident that it must be long before Siberia will be able to develop into an industrial country.

But cheaper means of communication are needed not only for the industrial development of the country, but also for providing its inhabitants with the necessities of life. In a former chapter I have drawn attention to the fact that the natives of northern Siberia are dying out from chronic starvation. Wheat, which in Minusinsk on the upper Yenisei may often be bought at 10 kopeks a pood—say 5d. per cwt.—costs in Yeniseisk 80 kopeks to one rouble a pood, at Turukansk 2 roubles, in the taiga or on the tundra from 4 to 7 roubles a pood—and this on the same river! And yet the great waterways of northern Siberia—the Ob, the Yenisei, and the Lena—are teeming with the most splendid fish, the country abounds in valuable minerals, and to the forests there are no limits!

The necessity of cheaper communications therefore is evident. And Siberia possesses these, or at all events the potentialities for them, in her great rivers, making maritime

connection between Europe and the very heart of the country possible. "In Siberia," says one of the most able men of that country, [1] "exist the greatest possibilities for communication in its wonderful waterways, the like of which are not to be found anywhere on our globe. Here we have the gigantic rivers of Ob, Yenisei, and Lena, which are accessible to ocean-going steamers over distances of more than 1400 miles from their estuaries. Thus steamers may go straight from London to the city of Yeniseisk. These rivers intersect Siberia from the borders of China to the shores of the Arctic Ocean; into them tributaries larger than the Volga empty themselves, such as the Aldan, Vilui, Angarà, Irtish, Podkamennaya- and Nischnaya-Tunguska; and into these tributaries in their turn flow other large streams, almost all of them navigable for great distances."

During the last 26 years, from the first passage over the Kara Sea to the mouth of the Yenisei, the possibility of maritime communication between Europe and northern Siberia has been fully demonstrated. Many of the first experiments, it is true, failed. Of the 27 ships which started for the Yenisei during the period between 1877 and 1886, only 12 reached their destination. The other 15 were either lost in the ice or compelled to return. But it is evident that most of these failures depended on lack of knowledge and experience with regard to the peculiar conditions of the weather and the ice in the Kara Sea. The

[1] Vide *Sjeverny Morskoi Putj*, p. 6.

ventures made during the following decade proved more successful, thanks to the skill and experience of the well-known Arctic explorer, Captain Wiggins, who conducted most of the commercial expeditions to the mouth of the Yenisei up to 1896. Nearly all of the 22 steamers which sailed for the river during that period reached their destination.

During the summers of 1896 and 1897 the condition of the ice in the Kara Sea was very favorable, and the six steamers which sailed in the former year encountered no ice. In 1898 only one steamer reached the mouth of the Yenisei, and the mercantile fleet of five steamers which started from London for the river in 1899, had to return on account of the ice, and lost one steamer.

There is no doubt that the difficulties in the way of maritime communication with northern Siberia could be overcome by modern methods, and a fairly regular trade established between the great Siberian rivers and Europe. But at the same time nothing has been done to overcome these difficulties. There are as yet no correct charts of the sea-coast between the White Sea and the Yenisei, and there are but few soundings; there are no proper sailing directions, no depôts or stations of refuge along the shores, no meteorological stations at the mouths of the rivers, or at the southern point of Novaya Zemlia, and no telegraphic communication with the last-named places. If these elementary measures were taken for observing and reporting on the conditions of the ice, etc., and for security in navigation and salvage in case of accidents, there is no

doubt that, with specially constructed steamers, and collective experience and skill in Arctic navigation, the difficulties that have hitherto stood in the way would certainly be overcome.

But even under the present unfavourable conditions the greatest obstacles have been not those of nature, but of man. They have been due rather to the attitude of the authorities, which seems to have been determined by the interests of a few Russian manufacturers and monopolists at the cost of the welfare and development of Siberia.

The story of the endeavours of various English firms to establish sea trade between northern Siberia and Europe, of their sacrifices and losses, not only on account of the natural difficulties in the way, but also of this attitude of the Russian authorities, is too well known to English readers to need repeating here.

The authorities have evidently resolved to practise the policy of the closed door.

The question is: Will this policy be successful and beneficial to Siberia and to the mother-country? It would be invidious to review the history of the opening-up of northern Siberia and compare how much has been done to this end by foreigners and how much by Russians. It would be alike uncourteous for a stranger to try and find the answer to the above question in the history and present internal condition of Russia and Siberia. But it can hardly be considered unfair to quote the views of a well-known Siberian, who represents the unanimous opinion of the more thoughtful of his countrymen.

The endeavour to promote commercial traffic over great distances by means of subsidies from government have always proved, and must always prove, a failure, as on the Amur and elsewhere. The Siberians must import their machines and tools from abroad, and must export their cereals. How can this be effected without joint foreign and Siberian enterprise in establishing regular trade in northern Siberia, for which freedom from duty on goods imported over the Kara Sea is an absolute necessity? If we know, as we do, that even to-day the peasants in European Russia can compete with the railroads in the transport of goods by horses along the railway lines, and that peasants in the province of Tula are pondering over the problem of avoiding all kinds of metal in their carts, and thus reverting to a species of latter-day Stone Age because of the enormous prices of iron and steel, is it then possible for the Siberians to hope that their raw material will find its way three or four thousand miles from Yeneseisk and Irkutsk to Russia, and that the necessary machines and tools, etc. will be brought from Russia to Siberia at prices accessible to the average Siberian or even to the capitalist?[1]

As for the ice-breaker of Admiral Makaroff, with which he hoped to establish regular communication over the Kara Sea to Siberia, the Siberians say,

"*Free admission of foreign goods at the mouths of our great rivers is the best ice-breaker!*"

[1] Condensed from "*Sjeverny Morskoi Putj.*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL CULTURE IN SIBERIA.

The America of the Old World—The Tercentenary of Siberia—Her Needs formulated—A System of reckless Plunder—Illiteracy of the Russian Conquerors—Persecutions of the Colonists—The "Gold-Barons" and "Vodka-Kings"—Stagnation of Industry—Education—Influence of the Swedish Prisoners of War—Pioneers of Culture in Siberia—Yadrintseff on the Future of the Country.

It is only natural to make comparisons between Siberia and North America. Siberia, taken as a whole, possesses natural riches comparable to those of America, and has, as a colony, the advantage of not being separated from the mother-country by any sea.

"Siberia is not a country suitable only as a place of exile," says the *Novoye Vremya* in an article on the country at its tercentenary jubilee in 1883. "Siberia possesses an immense extent of land for colonisation by the surplus population in Russia which must be created by the present agrarian system. Here we have our United States, and there is no country so happily situated as ours, which does not need to send its emigrants across the sea, but settles them in its immediate neighbourhood."

But it is only with regard to natural resources and possibilities of development that the parallel holds good

between Siberia and the United States; the realisation of these possibilities in the past history of the two countries forms the sharpest imaginable contrast.

The following passage occurs in one of the resolutions passed at the tercentenary jubilee of Siberia:—"America has in *one* century reached a degree of development of which we never dared even to dream.... Australia has likewise during this century progressed with gigantic strides and can now rejoice in a material and spiritual development the like of which we in Siberia have perhaps never even heard.... And Siberia...?"

At the above jubilee the city council of Yeniseisk passed a resolution and sent it to the government. It is an interesting document and I think this paragraph of it will bear quotation:—

"With this year (1883) Siberia completes her 300th year under Russian rule, a space of time which ought to have been sufficient for her development up to the point of standing alone; but on looking back, one's heart cannot but become oppressed because there is nothing satisfactory, nothing solid to be seen. Only a few feeble seeds and scions struggle here and there, but how pale and stunted they appear! One sees full well that something is lacking in order to make development possible.... Is it not time to awake to real earnestness, to a thorough realisation of the actual state of things and the needs of the present day—now that we are at the end of our three centuries of existence?" And then they go on to formulate these needs

as follows:—(1) The introduction of the Zemstvo institution (a kind of local board); (2) a public judiciary system; [1] (3) personal liberty and the inviolability of personal property; (4) liberty to move from one place to another, and (5) the abolition of the exile system.

These very modest demands, in which the *De profundis* cry of the Siberians on their day of jubilee breaks out, are significant enough of the state of things in that unhappy country, and point out some of the fundamental causes of its lack of progress.

In studying the history of Siberia two epochs are distinguishable: that of the conquest of the country, and that of the beginning of colonisation and social organisation. Through both of these epochs there runs as a red line the system of reckless plunder, which, unmitigated by any redeeming feature whatever, and without the modifying influence of a budding and growing spiritual culture, continues to this day. Says Yadrintseff, one of the men most thoroughly acquainted with Siberia:—

"Even to this day we look in vain for an epoch of intellectual and spiritual awakening among the population. One of the greatest historical missions for us to accomplish is to infuse the spirit of life into this colossal body."

The conquerors of Siberia—the trappers and the Kossacks—and those that followed in their footsteps, were all

[1] A couple of years ago the system of Justices of the Peace was introduced in Siberia, by which the old Asiatic methods of justice were somewhat ameliorated.

bands of robbers, consisting of fugitive criminals and slaves, and various adventurers who were actuated by no other motives than those of extorting from the natives as much as possible of their precious furs, and of plundering the prehistoric graves of their treasures of silver and gold. The victories obtained over the natives did not depend on

NATIVE FOX-TRAP.

any higher degree of civilisation on the part of the invaders—on the contrary, the natives almost invariably stood on a higher level both morally and otherwise than their conquerors—but on the fact that the Russians possessed firearms, and were animated by an insatiable rapacity, which urged them onwards, not only through the wildernesses of Siberia, but over the northern Pacific to

America, as far south as California. "One needs only to recall the state of civilisation in Russia during the 16th and 17th centuries," says Yadrintseff, "to understand how entirely void of all culture and scientific interest was the conquest of Siberia. The later discoveries and annexations were, almost without exception, also actuated exclusively by rapacity. The trappers, hunters, and traders who went to Siberia during the 17th and 18th centuries were just as ignorant and not less uncivilised than the first founders of the Siberian colonies. Even those at the head of great undertakings were uncivilised and rough men. The cultural level of the native Siberian population corresponded to that of the inhabitants of European Russia. The Russians brought with them agriculture. [1] That was all." [2]

Not only the common people among the Russian colonists, but also the priests were illiterate. I have elsewhere pointed out the fact that even to-day illiteracy—*e.g.* among the Buriats—is much less than among the peasantry in European Russia. It is therefore no wonder that the Russian colonists easily forget their native tongue and adopt the language, manners, and superstitions of the natives, —become, in short, "Buriatised" and "Yakutised".

In order to escape from extortion and oppression on the

[1] Agriculture, however, was practised by many of the aborigines before the arrival of the Russians, though the methods of the latter were sometimes, it is true, rather better. On the other hand, even at the present day, many of the natives of the far east (Transbaikalia) cultivate the soil much better than do the Siberian colonists.

[2] Vide *Sibir kak Colónija*, N. Yadrintseff.

part of the officials a great many immigrants fled far away into the wilderness and established colonies, which sometimes existed for several decades before they were discovered. "This dispersal of the Siberian colonists," says Yadrintseff,[1] "evoked fresh persecution of the fugitives about the middle of the 18th century." But these persecutions only increased the number of those who fled to escape them into the depths of the endless forests, the valleys of the Altai mountains, and the borders of Mongolia. They were especially directed against the Raskolniki (sectarians). The historian Islowtzoff states that 3000 of these people were massacred in the Ural mountains, and in the year 1760 several thousands more burned themselves alive in order to escape their persecutors.[2]

Even up to quite late times there have been occasions when large numbers of colonists have suddenly disappeared. "In 1874," says Yadrintseff,[3] "1700 emigrants from Viatka were staying in the province of Tomsk. They had spent a long time in trying to obtain the right of settling as colonists; but after having encountered numberless difficulties, they finally all suddenly disappeared, except 200 individuals, who went to the province of Yeniseisk."

[1] *Siberien*, N. Yadrintseff, p. 157.

[2] Through this "baptism of fire" these sectarians, driven to fanaticism by relentless persecution, believed that they would not only "escape the rule of Antichrist," but also gain entrance into paradise. Shutting themselves up in large buildings, they set them on fire, and thus hundreds of them perished at a time.

[3] *Siberien*, p. 168.

In 1875 no less than 1345 families in Tomsk disappeared in the same way.

Such independent flourishing colonies, as I have stated, have from time to time been discovered in various parts of Siberia, especially in the forest-regions of Tomsk and on the borders of Mongolia, and sometimes even beyond the Russian boundaries. On their discovery the runaways have often been severely punished, but on account of their large number they have of late years escaped without any further penalty than that of being placed under official rule. [1]

The gold-fields and the distilleries have created the first beginnings of modern industry in Siberia. The "gold-Barons" Sibiriakoff, Basilevsky, Njemtchin and others, and the Siberian "vodka-king", Kosiello Poklevsky, have led the way. Immense quantities of vodka are consumed in Siberia. Vodka plays the principal part in the trade with the natives; the working-men pour their small earnings down their throats in the shape of vodka during the many obligatory saints'-days and "saint-Mondays"; and the peasants do likewise. Thus the peasants of Minusinsk, for example, consumed vodka to the value of no less than one million roubles during the year 1896. [2] The first

[1] Count Leo Tolstoy in a conversation with me once said that he intended to write a story about such a colony in the wilds of Siberia, established by Russian peasants who had fled from "civilisation" and led a happy life, until they were discovered and reduced to the same state of misery as before.

[2] In 1894 there were in Western Siberia 18 distilleries and 22 breweries, in Eastern Siberia 16 distilleries and 9 breweries, and in the Amur district

steamer was brought to Siberia by the "vodka-king" Poklevsky in 1843 for the transport of vodka and grain to and from the Irtish. At present there are in Siberia about 100 steamers large and small, and about 200 other craft. A considerable number of these steamers are chartered or owned by the well-known M. Sibiriakoff, who of all the capitalists of Siberia has done most towards the economical and spiritual development of his country.

Characteristic of the primitive economical conditions of this part of the world is the flourishing system of usury. According to official statistics, the average interest on loans in Irkutsk, for example, is 5 per cent per month, while it is occasionally as much as 200 per cent per annum.

Under such economic conditions industries cannot flourish, and Siberia is for these entirely dependent on European Russia, the products of which—often of inferior quality—fetch fabulous prices. The principal commercial transactions between Siberia and European Russia have hitherto taken place at the annual fair of Irbit (1st of February to the 1st of March). During the period from 1890—1896 the Siberians on an average bought six times as much from Russia as they sold to her, and a great part of the raw material which they exported to the mother-country, such as tallow, hides, flax, etc., they again imported in the shape of manufactured articles.

one distillery and 16 breweries. Yet these do not satisfy the demand, and considerable quantities of strong liquors and wines are imported from Russia both by land and sea (from Odessa to Vladivostok) and also from abroad.

The feeble industrial development of Siberia is abundantly evident in the fact that the houses even in the largest cities are at the present day still built from planks sawn by hand, and the primitive river-craft are innocent of a single nail in their construction. In the whole of Siberia there are only 3 iron-foundries, which annually produce less than $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the entire produce of the empire. Iron ore has as yet not been discovered anywhere along the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the rich mine found in Yakutsk cannot be worked because of its great distance from the railroad. Thus the ironworks of the Ural should find a good market in Siberia.

In 1895 the total number of industrial establishments in Siberia amounted to 650, of which 280 were tanneries and establishments for making overcoats of sheep-skins, 16 candle-factories, 8 woollen factories, and 11 dairies. Most of these establishments are small and insignificant; by far the greatest percentage of the produce of the country is exported as raw material. Besides the 40,000 workmen occupied in the goldfields during the summer, 15,000 to 20,000 are engaged at the factories.

The general system of plunder is also applied to the industries of the country. A labourer in the damp and cold felt-factories, for instance, whose working day lasts from 3—4 a.m. to 10—11 p.m., receives for all his work during the eight winter months about 60 roubles, and as a rule dies a premature death! Those working at the so-called "peasant-industries" (making furniture, carts, sledges

etc.), make about 30 to 40 roubles during the winter and 60 to 70 roubles during the whole year. The system of flogging the working people is still practised; the truck-system is general, and work in the Siberian industries has often the character of forced labour.

The Trans-Siberian railway will no doubt cause great changes. It has already given the death-blow to the fair at Irbit and to several other centres of commerce, which will be supplanted by others or simply disappear; and in addition to the immense influx of immigrants of which I have written in other chapters, it has attracted a large number of adventurers and some foreign capital, mostly Belgian. These are some of its principal results up to date.

Educational and spiritual development in Siberia is still less marked. According to Yadrintseff, only 0.38 per cent of the entire population visit any school, [1] and the quality of this microscopic amount of popular instruction is, as a rule, very inferior. The first attempt at the spread of higher education—namely, the establishment of the University of Tomsk, was effected by private energy and generosity, and it still has to fight with numberless obstacles intentionally placed in the way of the light which shows signs of glimmering in the general darkness.

Reviewing the history of Siberia we invariably find that most of the little progress which has been made towards a happier state of things in this "most distressful country",

[1] The corresponding figures for European Russia are about 1.29 per cent.

over which the curse of the exile-system has rested like a nightmare for nearly 300 years, has from first to last been due to the exertions of exiled prisoners of war, sectarians, and politicals.

In 1657 200 Polish prisoners of war were sent to the Amur country, and the Russian author Pypin tells us that, as late as the last century, travellers in Siberia found entire Polish villages, which were distinguished by their higher enlightenment and morals. Similar opinions have repeatedly been expressed by travellers and others on the colonies of exiled sectarians.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the first impulse to civilisation in Siberia was given by the Swedish officers of Charles XII., who after his defeat at Pultawa in July 1709, were sent to Tobolsk and other places in Siberia. Standing on an immeasurably higher level of general culture and knowledge than even the highest military and civil officers in Siberia, and animated by strong religious feeling, these brave warriors of Charles XII., deprived of their carnal weapons, now seized the arms of the spirit and with the same energy devoted themselves to warfare against the powers of darkness and ignorance. They established schools to which the better-class Siberians sent their sons from distant quarters to be instructed in Latin, modern languages, mathematics, geography and history, etc. In Tobolsk they built a church, where Lutheran services were held in the Swedish language. Both the prudent Tsar, Peter I., and his cunning governor of Siberia, Prince Gagàrin, who at

that time was conspiring against his royal master in order to make himself Tsar over Siberia, were desirous of turning the high qualities of the Swedish officers to good account for their own purposes. Thus, while the common Swedish soldiers were made into Kossacks or put to forced labour, their officers not engaged in school-teaching were employed in discovering minerals and in establishing the first iron-works in the Ural mountains, while others engaged in the work of exploration in the most distant parts of the country. Thus expeditions under the command of Swedish officers traversed both the southern and northern parts of Siberia to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, and the Swedes were the first who sailed (in open boats made of birch) over the sea of Okhotsk to Kamschatka. It is probable indeed, that some of them got as far as Alaska. After a captivity of about twenty years most of these officers returned to Sweden, but some of them remained in the country.

A new impulse towards enlightenment and culture was given a century later by the Decabrists, some of the most intellectual men of Russian society, who after the unsuccessful revolt of 1825 were banished to Siberia. A great many of these people, it is true, perished from exposure and privations in horrible prisons, or on the desolate tundras of the north, but a number survived and exerted a civilising influence whose effects could not be entirely effaced by the prevalent obscurantism or the Asiatic *régime*. Ere the good done by these men had perished, the great influx of intelligent political exiles after the Polish revolt

in the sixties, and the Nihilist movement in Russia later on, came once more to aid in the country's advance.

In spite of the greatest privation and suffering these martyrs of light and liberty have accomplished, and are

YUKAGIR AND CHILD.

continually accomplishing, a cultural mission in Siberia, the significance of which only a nearer or remoter future will fully demonstrate. A large number of these men and women have perished by the way, victims to the terrible hardships to which they have been exposed, or have

disappeared without leaving a trace. But the survivors have not lived in vain.

As to the outlook for the future, I shall not venture on any prophecies of my own, especially as the views with regard to this subject are very much divided even among men possessing the most thorough knowledge of the country and its people. I shall therefore limit myself to some quotations from one of the most able and reliable authorities—namely, N. Yadrintseff:

"Our colonies still suffer from want of the most necessary social rights. In this respect we have sinned much. Without social progress our colonies, instead of ripening into a flourishing dependence which would be of the greatest importance to the mother-country, will continually remain the same barbarous, hopeless, and forgotten regions as hitherto.

"It is not improbable that Siberia, by an increased export combined with a continued neglect of its own inner wants, will get into a still more hopeless condition than that prevailing in modern European Russia. The export of the grain of European Russia, which has been so much talked of, exceeds its present—not, under better conditions, its possible—producing power, whereby the producers, the peasants, even in the very richest grain-growing provinces are ruined; and this export, which through the lack of capital in the interior of the country is carried to the utmost limits, by no means ameliorates the lot of the people. Under these specifically Russian conditions—namely, lack

of working capital, suitable labour, systematic enterprise, and thriftiness—the opening up of Siberia by new means of communication does not at all mean the abolishment of the Siberian system of plunder and pillage in all economic departments."

On the other hand, Yadrintseff owns that "there can be no doubt that improved communications, even under the most unfavorable conditions, will *finally* be of great and lasting benefit to Siberia. These new communications will arouse new life and competition, of which Siberia sadly stands in need."

"We know," he continues, "the great struggle going on between old and new Siberia. We know the typical old Siberian, we know the friend of the old, effete formulas, the enemy of all novelties and progress, the favourer of a corrupt administration and of the scoundrels which the exile-system sends to Siberia, the representative of monopolism and of a system of pillage and plunder which has flourished for centuries. But with ever-growing strength a new force is rising against the old – Young Siberia, representing the independent, youthful, and active generation, capable of opposition and prepared to take up the work of colonisation, and possessing a thorough knowledge of the manifold wants of the country."

It is not for a traveller and a stranger in the land to contradict such an authority as Yadrintseff, and I will consequently limit myself to the expression of a sincere wish that his expectations may be fulfilled. But it will

require an unusual degree of energy on the part of "Young Siberia" to overcome monopolism and corruption, and the hopeless ignorance and barbarism of the masses, and to push the development of the country forward to the point of being able to compete with other nations, or at least to stand alone. That Mr. Yadrintseff was fully conscious of the great difficulty of the task is evident from the following words of his:—

"Siberia is not North America. There it is only necessary to build a railroad through the wilderness in order to call into being a flourishing cultural development. Siberia, on the other hand, with its lack of enterprise and competent labour must stick to the old methods, and its new means of communication are to be considered, not as the commencement of a new civilisation, but rather as aids to a half-effete and sterile cultural system already existing." [1]

[1] N. Yadrintseff. "*Sibirien; Geographische, ethnographische und historische Studien*," pp. 494—7.

APPENDIX.

YAKUT TRAVEL PHRASES.

In order to know a people thoroughly you must learn their language. Unfortunately I had not time to learn Yakut enough to be able to converse easily with the natives. But in a mixed gibberish of Yakut-Russian I was able from the beginning to exchange ideas with some of them, and later on I began to understand their conversation, which usually turned on the work of their daily life—namely, fish and fishing. Without pretending to compete with Baedeker by producing a Guide to the Yakut Language, I may perhaps venture to give a few specimens of the language.

On first coming among the Yakuts the ear of the traveller constantly catches, *nolens volens*, the word: "*Ä-ä!*" [1] Wherever there are Yakuts, the air vibrates with "Ä-ä!" And this is a very useful word, by means of which you can get far. It is difficult to translate, but corresponds somewhat to the English words: "Yes," "Just so," "You know!"

If, for example, a Yakut asks you: "*Sakali biläṅ do?*" (Can you speak Yakut?), and, instead of answering: "*Sokk, toïön!*" (No, sir) or "*Sakali bilbeppin*" (I do not know the Yakut language), you simply say: "*Ä-ä!*" he will give

[1] *Ä* pronounced as *a* in "an", *A* as in the word "father", *Ö* as "e" in "her".

you a whole lecture in Yakut on fishing, hunting etc., wound up with a humble petition for a little tobacco and vodka. You reply again with: "*Ä-ä!*", or another word which soon fastens itself in your memory, namely: "*Chòp, chòp!*" (Good, good!).

You arrive at a Yakut camp or yurta. The host comes tottering out to meet you in his costume of hairless reindeer-skin (it is summer), black with smoke and dirt, cap in hand, and his lank hair hanging down his shoulders, bowing and saluting in mixed Yakut-Russian: "*Daróva, daróva!*" (Hail, hail!), or in classical Yakut: "*Kapsä dagor!*" [Tell (news), friend]. You answer: "*Daróva, daróva!*" If you want to show off in genuine Yakut, you reply: "*Kapsćka táktahokk!*" (Nothing to tell!); while if you wish to be polite, you ask: "*Kaita ólleroget?*" (How do you dwell?). The Yakut replies: "*Oshugoi du ólleroby tt*" (We dwell well), asking you to step into his hut, where you squat down on your heels to the right of the fireplace.

The following conversation with perhaps a few variations then takes place between you and your host.

"*Togó bolty bitt?*" What do you catch? you ask.

He replies:—

"*Bult bar,*" We have catch, or,

"*Bult übutt,*" We have good catch.

"*Tok bult bar?*" What kind of catch do you have?

"*Balik bult bar,*" Fish-catch we have, or,

"*Kürsia bult bar,*" Fox-catch we have.

"*Kas illim nákken?*" How many nets have you?

"*Ilim sóppen.*" I have no nets.

"*Kaita sokk?*" Why none?

"*Oldavolo àggajak bar. Bes—alta ilimnappen.*" Yes, some I have. Five or six nets.

YAKUT AND TENT, BULUN.

"*Tin kàstüballik tùttär ilimga?*" How many fish do you catch in each net in the night?

"*Ilimga ounak bàlik bar.*" About ten or so in each net.

"*Oshugoi bult. Turär balik do?*" Good catch. Is it standing fish?

"*Baigal-balik böhölak ili kimbilär aiam balik.*" It may be sea-fish or, who knows, travelling fish.

"*Balik dàkken do?*" Have you any fish?

"*Balik dakbin.*" We have fish.

"*Balikken àtteliggen do?*" Do you sell fish?

"*Attelibben.*" I sell.

"*Kastiberan tchurtsiska bérebin sisbalik.*" I give 4 roubles for 100 fish.

"*Söpshäki.*" It is cheap.

Monotonous conversation, you will say. Yes, but it was almost the only kind which I heard among the fishing-natives on the lower Lena. If you want to end the interview, you use the corrupt Russian: "*Prostée!*" Good-bye!

The following may be regarded as a typical conversation on the subject of hiring reindeer. The traveller probably begins the bargaining about the reindeer-driving (*tabba-aien*) thus:—

"*Tabba lakken do?*" Have you reindeer?

"*Tabba lakkbin.*" We have reindeer.

"*Tabba nada do?*" Do you need reindeer?

"*Nado.*" We do need (reindeer).

"*Töhö tabba nado?*" How many reindeer do you need?

"*Méheka surbá bes tabba nado sergalin lompalin shummin bölin.*" I need 25 reindeer with sledges and covering (over the luggage) and ropes (6 fathoms to make fast the luggage).

"*Kielakkin do?*" Have you people?

"*Kieköster do köstebetto anno min an bilbeppin.*" (If) people are to be found or not, I cannot say for certain.

"*Än bilbäkken kem billäk tustáki?*" You do not know! who will then know?

"*Onok. Oldavollar kie köstöga.*" So it is. But people will be had.

"*Kanno bardöng?*" Where do you want to go?

"*Katangskoie-ga baröbin.*" To Katangskoie I will go.

"*Rak sir, dagör! Botölga botömni bokaranga surdáksol.*" A long way, friend! In this storm, in this cold a very difficult journey!

"*Surdák sol billilak oldavollar bárekka nado.*" A difficult journey no doubt, but I must go.

"*Kapsä! Tabba bireng do tokto?*" Speak! Will you let me have reindeer or not?

"*Kimbillär tabba takser do kaita do, bedöng tabba köstökok.*" I do not know, if there are any reindeer or not—large reindeer there are probably not many.

"*Tabban kastibinnen Katangskoie ga?*" How much do you ask for each reindeer to Katangskoie?

"*Birdi sirgalak tabba besti süs.*" Reindeer to one sledge 5 roubles.

"*Chop! chop!*" Good! good!

"*Mä sadakta-öl mä bes istappen ällättä orduksok.*" Here you have as earnest money 5 roubles, not more nor less, it is all I possess.

"*Toiön tullöggn.*" The gentleman (you) is jesting.

"*Agall katchebin!*" Give me the money!

"*Hä! albiniggin do digin?*" What! do you believe I will cheat you?

"*Sokk toiön.*" *Méheka sakalá urut kordotchobit.* No, sir. We Yakuts always ask to get payment beforehand.

"*Ana, kapsä!*" Now speak!

"*Tabbalär kaita kapsä tiäkput?*" How shall we speak (bargain) about the reindeer?

"*Ölbit sippitt börröschir kimienä moyo bologó?*" (If) the reindeer dies, on whose neck will that hang?

"*Tabba ölien öller min beyem illebin. Tabba sippitt börröschir bäget moyolugit.*" (If) the reindeer dies from some disease, it hangs on my neck; (if) the reindeer be lost, be killed by wolf, that hangs on your neck.

"*Söbböligget do?*" Will you have it that way?

"*Chop! Oshugoi tabba emiss tabba berenkör!*" Good! (But) good reindeer, fat reindeer, please let us have!

"*Chop! chop!*" Good! good!

"*Illigan agal!*" Give me (your) hand!

"*Bittebitt, djöng istäng!*" The agreement is made, the people present be witnesses thereof!

"*Ä-ä! djöng istäng!*" Yes, yes! The people present have heard it!

"*Istobuppit! Tangará oshugoi sol birden!*" We have heard it! God give them a good journey!

"*Ä-ä! Chop, chop!*"

The numerals are as follow:—

1.	Bir.	20.	Sürba.
2.	Ikke.	30.	Ottutt.
3.	Üs.	40.	Tschördon.
4.	Tschört.	50.	Behon.
5.	Bès.	60.	Alton.
6.	Alta	70.	Setta-on.
7.	Setta.	80.	Agga-on.
8.	Aguss.	90.	Tagga-on.
9.	Togguss.	100.	Süs.
10.	Onn.	200.	Ikke-süs.
11.	Onordo-bir.	300.	Üs-süs, etc.
12.	Onordo-ikke.	1,000.	Tüsatch. [1]
13.	Onordo-üs, etc.	2,000.	Ikke-tüsatch, etc.

[1] Borrowed from the Russian.

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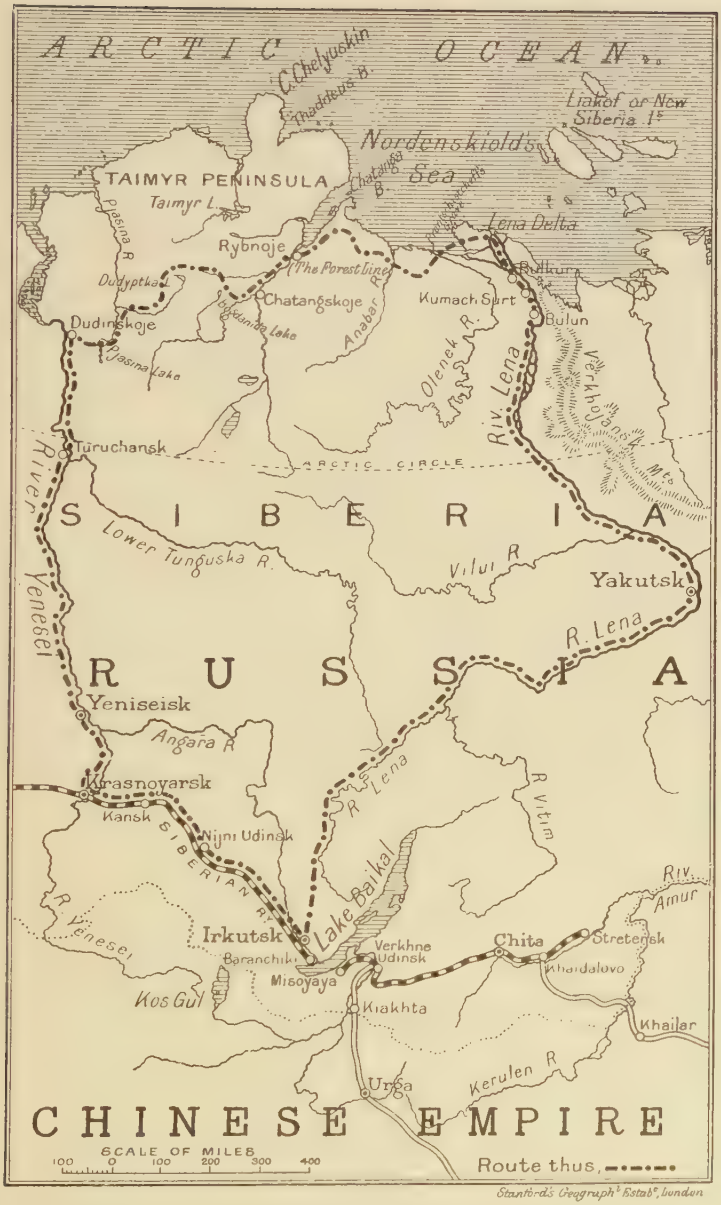

MAP OF THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE.